

*“An exploration into the use of solution-focused counselling when working with adolescents who
report experiencing bullying”*

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ABSTRACT

International and local studies indicate that bullying is a significant problem within New Zealand schools. School counsellors are positioned to see the impact of bullying on individuals, that is not visible to the wider community. This research provided the opportunity to examine the therapeutic process and the impact it can have on those experiencing bullying.

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is a collaborative approach that privileges the expertise of the client and encourages change through the amplification of client strengths and past successes while focusing on a preferred future. This research explores the use of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy when working with adolescents experiencing bullying.

The context for this research is the school counselling department of a high school in Christchurch, New Zealand. Qualitative, practice-based research methods are used, and data was collected through the recording of counselling sessions, with the researcher as counsellor. Two clients, both in their first year at high school, were participants in this research while undertaking up to six counselling sessions, related to the bullying they were experiencing.

Narrative analysis ensured the data is presented with consideration of the wider story it tells. The findings and discussion highlight the ways in which Solution-Focused Brief Therapy has supported the participants through the therapeutic process. Some of those explored include subjective measures such as scaling that indicate improvement over time, how client perceptions about the problem and possible solutions can change and the impact on self-identity. A key insight was the impact that a sense of support and understanding can have on client agency. This research makes a

positive addition to the body of literature on bullying and provides useful insight for practitioners working with adolescents experiencing bullying.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Over the years my personal interest in the experience of students who are being bullied has grown. I have reflected on my own experience of school where I was at varying times a victim, bully and bystander and I have tried to make sense of it and the way it was dealt with. While working as a primary school teacher I was able to gain insight into how bullying can look in a classroom and school playground. I have noticed that the same behaviour can be terribly upsetting to one student and not impact another. I have encountered students who at different times have been both the victim and the bully and have also experienced being the parent of a child that is the recipient of bullying behaviour. The complexity of dealing with this issue in a school setting, when working with parents of the bully, the victim and indeed the students themselves, is fraught with difficulty. I have had concerns about the impact of labelling students with the term “bully” or “victim” and wondered if there is a better way to approach this. Since I have been working as a school counsellor I have been involved with instances of bullying in a new way. I have found that being able to focus on the reality as my client sees it, and working in a solution-focused way, has enabled me to see the possibility of allowing a client who feels bullied to move away from a position of feeling victimised. While in many instances the bullying may need to be addressed outside the counselling room, particularly where issues of safety are present, my role is to support the client in taking those steps. In situations where the client may not wish to take any action against the bully, they are still able to be listened to, believed and encouraged to find their own solutions.

As a student at the University of Canterbury, studying to complete a Masters of Counselling, I have been taught to use Solution-Focused Brief Therapy through studying and practising its application. Coming across the work of Sue Young in the book *Interviewing for Solutions*, I was inspired to see an example of an innovator that had begun to “creatively apply emerging solution-building principles

and practices” (De Jong & Berg, 2013, p. 289). Her work with students impacted by bullying has been the catalyst for this research. It has informed my desire to gain further understanding into the experience of those who have been bullied. It has also prompted me to consider the ways in which solution-focused counselling can enable clients to move away from victimhood and increase their agency.

The current study took place at the high school where I undertook my placement. Working two days per week throughout 2019 as part of a team of school counsellors, I was able to learn about the unique role of a school counsellor in New Zealand. Tasked with providing the pastoral care for students, I discovered the importance of working alongside the school administration and staff and within the school system to provide the best possible support for all the students I worked with. During this placement I worked with students that presented with a wide variety of issues, including many that were impacted by bullying. I was interested to understand the role that the school played when bullying was reported and the impact this had on all who were involved. I noticed that some students were hesitant to report bullying and found that the use of SFBT was particularly useful in these instances. Although there is significant literature and research looking at bullying, there is little that focuses on the use of SFBT. I wish to contribute to the research into bullying and provide an in-depth look at SFBT when working therapeutically with adolescents impacted by bullying.

Organisation of research

Having described what has led me to this endeavour, in Chapter Two I look at the relevant literature that has informed my research. Chapter Three explains my methodology and the methods used throughout. In Chapter Four and Five I present my findings with each chapter representing a

different participant. In Chapter Six I conclude the study with a discussion of what I discovered throughout the research journey and consider this in light of relevant literature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction:

In this chapter I situate my research by first looking at the definition of bullying, before examining bullying in New Zealand schools. I then examine the development of SFBT, consider evidence of outcomes, its social constructionist underpinning, as well as specific techniques related to its application that form part of my practice in the context of this research. I also consider the integration of SFBT with Narrative Therapy, in order to acquaint the reader with some of the constructs that emerged during my research. Finally, I look specifically at SFBT and bullying, reviewing existing SFBT research relating to bullying.

Definition of bullying:

Throughout bullying research, including within New Zealand (Green, Harcourt, Mattioni & Prior, 2013) a common definition of bullying is taken from Dan Olweus (Olweus, 1993). He has been a significant contributor to the research into bullying as well as namesake to the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme in Norway, which was the first of its kind in the 1970s (Cecil & Molnar-Main, 2015). I found his definition best summarised as “a systematic and repeated set of hostile behaviours toward an individual who cannot properly defend himself or herself” (Kvarme, Aabø & Sæteren, 2016, p. 112). Olweus deemed it necessary for there to be an imbalance of power and negative intent on the part of the bully (Powell & Ladd, 2010). In their book titled *Bully-Proofing Children*, Scaglione and Scaglione (2006) suggest that Olweus’ definition is outdated and doesn’t include situations when a bully may target someone of equal strength or status or the times when a bully

may not be causing harm intentionally, despite it being perceived by the victim. The authors go on to provide a broader definition of bullying, while also noting the need to recognise the difference between bullying and simply an aggressive act (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006). The definition that they put forward is one that I believe is more relevant and that I carried with me into this piece of research.

“In our opinion, it is aggressive behaviour toward another, repeated over time, and it is deliberate and hurtful. It may not involve an imbalance of power or strength or an intention to harm another, depending on the motivation behind it” (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006, p. 5).

Bullying behaviour can be exhibited in a variety of ways. Both physical and verbal bullying are relatively self-explanatory and easily identifiable, with examples being punching or name calling. Social or relational bullying is less obvious, with examples being the spreading of rumours and/or social exclusion (Green et al., 2013). Even more difficult to identify is cyber bullying that can involve texting or social media and can occur at any time due to the nature of the medium (Green et al., 2013).

Bullying in Schools:

There are numerous reports and research internationally that espouse the detrimental effects of bullying in schools, the marginalised nature of those targeted and the link to adverse impacts such as depression, anxiety, school avoidance, health issues and social isolation. Having decided to focus on New Zealand research in this area, I wish to first reference the few studies that I found to be relevant outside of New Zealand, due to their exploration of an area not explored within the New Zealand studies.

Cranham and Carroll (2003) conducted a study of 10 students in an Australian high school and explored the social environment in the school, the impact this had on bullying behaviour and how it was viewed. The students, who represented bullies, victims, mediators and bystanders took part in a semi-structured interview. The authors found that there was a need to conform to the expectations of the social environment or risk social isolation. Adult intervention was seen as best to be avoided, and they found that low self-concept was evident in victims compared with the seeming popularity of the bully (Cranham & Carroll, 2003). The amount of student voice presented in this research was a strength, with significant portions of transcript included, which allowed a sense of the various perspectives. With such a small sample size, and being only at one school, it is not possible to consider the results to be generalisable, although it was helpful to consider the social context of a school and the possible implications for the participants in the current study (Cranham & Carroll, 2003).

Faye Mishna (2004) conducted a study in a Canadian public school that considered the impact of bullying from the perspective of the victims, their parents and the teachers. 61 students in grades 4 and 5 responded to a survey about the frequency and type of bullying they experienced, and a further five took part in individual semi structured interviews. Of the 61 students surveyed, all but two had experienced bullying in the previous school term (Mishna, 2004). The study found significant inconsistency around the way bullying was defined and dealt with in the school setting, and highlighted the complexity around bullying by friends that was often minimised by adults (Mishna, 2004). Despite the author calling for further research into the experience of those being bullied by friends, I was unable to locate subsequent qualitative studies with this overall focus. Despite not intending to focus in this area, the current study can contribute to this area of research.

A dissertation conducted in New England (Allen, 2014) presented the narratives of five adult women who experienced social exclusion while at school. Each story was presented individually, which helped to allow a stronger connection to the subjects, and an understanding of the unique situations that arose for each. The author identified four main themes; a desire to belong, the impact of being bullied, the failure of adults to protect, and the victim's ability to use their own resources for progress (Allen, 2014). Despite the historic nature of the bullying, which was not consistent with the current study, this research provided insight into the lasting impact of social exclusion for some. While the findings could not be generalised, they add to the existing body of research and contribute further voice to a marginalised group, which is something the current study hopes to achieve.

By looking at the current research into bullying in NZ schools I situate my study within the current local social context. I begin by presenting some of the data that looks at the rates of bullying in New Zealand, before examining a study that explores the current social discourse around bullying through analysis of media articles and responses in New Zealand. I report on research into the perspective of those working in schools, before considering a multi-level analysis of bullying and prevention programmes in New Zealand schools. I chose to focus primarily on New Zealand research within the school setting, due to the increased relevance to the setting in which I conducted my research.

Balanovic, Stuart and Jeffrey (2016) provide an interesting perspective on the social context of bullying within New Zealand through a thematic analysis of media articles (found on www.stuff.co.nz) which all deal with the attitude within New Zealand towards violence (Balanovic et al., 2016). Articles included for the review had a central theme of school bullying and were published in an 18-month period between 2012 and 2014 (Balanovic et al., 2016). Three prevailing

themes were highlighted: victim weakness, perpetrator vilification, and normalisation. The authors discuss a 'national mindset' where being tough, strong and uncomplaining are virtues and noted a sense of inevitability around aggression, and a belief in the necessity of preparing children for this reality (Balanovic et al., 2016,). The authors went on to suggest that complacency around our collective attitude to bullying could be a contributing factor to the bullying itself (Balanovic et al., 2016). These findings indicate a cultural acceptance of bullying, however there is no examination of how such a culture impacts on rates of bullying, or how it is dealt with.

International surveys provide data on the rates of bullying in New Zealand compared to other countries and related to other factors. The latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) took place in 2018, with almost 6,200 15-year-old New Zealand school students taking part, along with 79 countries and over 600,000 students internationally (Jang-Jones & McGregor, 2019). The survey looked specifically at student wellbeing and found New Zealand to be among the worst in the OECD for rates of bullying (6th highest) with 32 percent of students experiencing bullying a few times a month or more, compared to the OECD average of 23 percent (Jang-Jones & McGregor, 2019). New Zealand was found to have a significantly greater gender gap relating to bullying, with boys being bullied 7% more than girls, compared to the 3% OECD average, however social-relational bullying was the one area that girls experienced higher rates than boys (Jang-Jones & McGregor, 2019). This data was consistent with the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) results from 2014/2015 that reported on student exposure to bullying for both Year 5 and Year 9 students and found the rates in New Zealand were higher in all areas than the OECD average (Comparative Education Research Unit, Ministry of Education, 2017). Results from both surveys showed a link between students' sense of identity, belonging and achievement and increased rates of bullying. This suggests that "(b)ullying at school may discourage students from socialising with other students and result in them feeling isolated and withdrawn" (Comparative Education Research

Unit, Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 25). This data adds weight to the 2012 results from the Youth2000 surveys (most recent results pending publication), that look at adolescent mental health and found it to be declining slightly overall (Fleming et al., 2014). In a study investigating the changes between 2007 and 2012 from surveys of self-reported mental health, the authors (Fleming et al., 2014) noted an overall deterioration of students mental health, and pointed out the most notable decline related to emotional symptoms such as low mood, self -harming, and peer problems. Despite not specifically referencing bullying or expanding on the specifics of 'peer problems', they conclude that "the mental health of secondary students in New Zealand does require further attention" (Fleming et al., 2014, p. 479).

A report from Victoria University (Green et al., 2013) examined bullying within New Zealand schools using an online anonymous survey that had over 1,200 respondents. The aim of the study was to ascertain the perspectives of teachers and senior staff from secondary schools with regard to their experience of and understanding of how bullying is addressed in their schools. The report suggested that there is a lack of cohesion between school and families when it comes to bullying, and perhaps even respective blaming (Green et al., 2013). A tension between what respondents believe should be done to address bullying and what is being done existed, with 83% indicating the need for the whole school and wider community to be involved, and less than one third reporting the use of such programmes in their school (Green et al., 2013). Where respondents were able to make comments, some noted the need to widen the options of who could be involved to include the guidance counsellor, a role that was not included in the survey as either a respondent or as someone involved in responding to bullying. Another piece of research undertaken by two of the same authors (Harcourt, Jasperse & Green, 2014) looked at parents' perspective of bullying and affirmed the tension between school and home and a need for greater collaboration. In this systematic review of

13 studies the main findings were sorted into common themes, of which one was a need for greater support and the authors recommended providing information for both parents and students on available emotional support “to help them to cope with the wider negative effects of bullying”. These reports both point to a gap in research around the role of the school counsellor in relation to bullying.

A multilevel analysis into bullying at New Zealand high schools was conducted from a survey completed by 9,107 secondary school students (Denny et al., 2014). Exploring the different characteristics of schools and their culture in relation to bullying behaviour, this research reported that lower rates of bullying were not associated with the structural aspects of a school or with teacher or school action, but rather with schools where students themselves take action against bullying behaviour (Denny et al., 2014). The authors concluded that young people have a very important role in improving rates of bullying, and that work to develop “empathy, problem solving skills, and supportive positive relationships between peers may be an effective intervention in bullying prevention” (Denny et al., 2014, p. 266).

There is a growing body of research within New Zealand, but the field of research is incredibly wide and there is very little qualitative research looking at the individual response to being bullied and the impact of various forms of therapy. By situating my research in the high school setting, and within the counselling context, I am hoping to provide some further insight into the experience of individuals seeking help when being bullied, and into the effectiveness of using Solution Focused Brief Therapy.

Solution Focused Brief Therapy

The use of SFBT has been fundamental to this study and as such I will take a detailed look at this modality. I begin by considering the history and development of SFBT, before looking at its grounding in social constructionism, exploring the techniques used and examining relevant research.

SFBT was developed by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg in the 1970s and 80s, while they were working at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee (Hanton, 2011). Inspired by the work of Gregory Bateson and Milton Erickson, Berg and de Shazer were not constrained by prevailing ideas about how therapy should be conducted and sought to find a better way, through an inductive process of observation and reflection on the process and its efficacy (De Jong & Berg, 2013). They found that the solutions to clients' problems could be found in what they had already been doing and that if asked the right questions, clients would recognise their own ability to tackle the presenting problem, and this was not dependent on identifying or exploring the problem (De Jong & Berg, 2013).

SFBT recognises that client strengths and abilities create progress and not therapist knowledge, however, it is through the interaction of the two and a sharing of expertise that progress occurs (Shennan, 2014). Collaboratively a client and therapist build on what has worked and consider how to do more of it, recognising that the client is the expert.

SFBT is not based on theory, unlike most other modalities and just as it was developed over many hours of practice by its founders, it is not an approach that can simply be 'followed' by asking a set of questions. To become a skilled SFBT practitioner requires immersion and practice before competency is achieved (Shennan, 2014). SFBT allows clients to move away from a deficit thought process, where they can only see what they don't want, and allows them to imagine what they do want (de Shazer et al., 2007).

Gingerich and Peterson (2012) conducted a systematic qualitative review of all the available controlled outcome studies that were available to them at the time, in an effort to establish how effective SFBT is across different settings and issues. Of the 43 studies, 32 found SFBT to have a significant positive benefit and all but one showed a positive trend (Gingerich & Peterson, 2012, p. 279). 13 studies were working with school students, and it was found that SFBT intervention had a positive impact on self-esteem, self-efficacy and social competence and behaviour, with the authors concluding there was "strong evidence that SFBT is an effective treatment for a wide variety of behavioural and psychological outcomes", and is effective when working with children (Gingerich & Peterson, 2012, p. 281). The results from this review offer the ability to generalise on the efficacy of SFBT, which while useful at an organisational level, does not provide detail into the aspects of SFBT that were beneficial and why, which would help practitioners.

Social Constructionism

To define social constructionism with any sense of certainty is problematic given that "(s)ocial constructionism is, itself, a social construction that is always changing and subject to reconstruction"

(Rudes & Guterman, 2007, p. 387). What follows draws on the characteristics of social constructionism as it relates to SFBT.

De Jong and Berg (2013, p. 368) describe this theoretical perspective, stating that it “maintains that individuals’ sense of what is real – including their sense of the nature of their problems, competencies, and possible solutions – is constructed in interaction with others as they go through life”. The meaning made between client and therapist is therefore created as the conversation unfolds.

Language is a central element of SFBT and at the heart of social constructionism where “the only reality that we can share is the world that we cocreate in language” (Rudes & Guterman, 2007, p. 388). In recognising this it dispels any possibility that as a counsellor we can get to the truth of what is going on for a client, when all we can know is what is expressed through language, which is in the context of the conversation. The client and therapist must collaborate through conversation in order to find new understanding (Clark, 1996).

The concept of ‘self’ and knowing someone is not a fixed thing within social constructionism, but rather is ever changing (Hoffman, 1992). Similarly, a problem is not a fixed construct and exists in language rather than within a person, making the possibility of moving away from it more possible. Through the use of questions in SFBT there is the opportunity to create new formulations away from the problem as “questions carry assumptions and function to invite clients to construct themselves in directions consistent with the assumptions” (De Jong & Berg, 2013, p. 371).

SFBT Techniques

I wish to acquaint the reader with the SFBT techniques that form the foundation of my practice and therefor this research. I have broken these down to explain the purpose and significance of each.

The list of techniques is not exhaustive but merely those that were most relevant.

Scaling

Scaling involves creating a form of measurement with a high and low point by which a client can assert where they are, have been, and wish to be. While this does not have to be measured from 0 or 1 to 10, that is the most common scale and the one which I use most frequently. The use of scaling has become increasingly embedded in SFBT practice and is now a fundamental technique that is widely used and seen to be the most effective way to elicit exceptions (Shennan, 2014). While scales can be created for any aspect of work with a client, a general progress scale is the most consistently used and provides a way for client and therapist to measure progress (Shennan, 2014). Young and Holdorf (2003) used a scale that related to the client's experiences with bullying in every session, as a way of measuring progress and also to establish if the intervention process was helpful. Once a shared understanding is established about what the preferred future is for the client, scaling questions mean that in subsequent sessions "you can shift easily and effectively into goal formation on the basis of the client's answer to the scaling question about progress" (De Jong and Berg, 2013, p. 158). Shennan (2014, p. 103) explains that the purpose of a scale is not to assess the client and that the only assessment taking place "is being done by the client who will be rating their own progress entirely subjectively". He goes on to explain the significance of the number (the place they position themselves on the scale) to the client and the need for the counsellor to accept this number

fully. The scale is only effective if it is understood in the context of the co-constructed meaning that is created. To simply look at the numbers without the wider context would be meaningless and as a SFBT practitioner it is necessary to work at defining, in language that is meaningful to the client, the parameters of the scale. The integral part that scaling plays in the SFBT process, and in my research, will be made clear in the presentation of my findings.

Preferred Future and Miracle Question

Hanton (2011) explains the way that asking a client about their 'preferred future' is a process of creating a paradigm shift where the future does not need to be linked to the problem. While initially clients may see this preferred future as one where the problem is gone, it is in finding what is there instead that solutions to the problem can be found.

The miracle question involves asking a client to imagine waking up to a day where all their problems have magically disappeared. However, because they don't know this has occurred, they are then asked to consider what would make them notice the changes. The miracle question is a fundamental SFBT technique that is seen by many practitioners to be at the heart of the approach and provides an opportunity to lead clients toward their future and what they want, as opposed to away from their problems and what they don't want (Hanton, 2011). Hanton (2011, p. 82) states that "(t)he shift in thinking is essential to SFBT. It defines the approach". Steve de Shazer, who is a founding father of SFBT described the miracle question "as a frame-setting device, a way to initiate a language game that determines and defines what it is that the client and therapist are to talk about next" (de Shazer, 2000, p. 1) He stated that he had been using the miracle question in almost every first session since discovering it in the early 1980s (de Shazer, 2000). In that time the miracle question became standard practice in SFBT and eventually was considered a requirement of a first session

(Shennan, 2014, p. 51). What the miracle question offers over other ways of eliciting a preferred future is that “it gives clients permission to think about an unlimited range of possibilities” (De Jong and Berg, 2013, p. 91). When faced with a significant and possibly overwhelming problem, such as bullying, this can be useful and Young and Holdorf (2003) considered it fundamental to their approach. Not all SFBT practitioners use the miracle question, and rather stay with simply asking about a preferred future.

Exploring exceptions

Identifying and exploring exceptions is a key tenet to effectively building solutions. Given that most clients present with a focus on the problem, it is necessary to skilfully ask questions that encourage a focus on times when for some reason, the problem was not present or to a lesser degree (De Jong and Berg, 2013). Ideally the exception will have occurred relatively recently so that it is possible to access the memory more accurately, and this memory becomes what de Jong and Berg (2013, p. 110) called the “raw material for solution building”. Part of the job of an SFBT practitioner is to be always looking to identify exceptions and then to amplify the success of these exceptions to the client.

Giving Compliments

Complimenting was initially only used at the end of sessions to highlight the “strengths and past successes that might be useful in achieving their goals” (De Jong & Berg, 2013, p. 38). As SFBT has evolved, the use of complimenting has become embedded throughout the session and is seen as not only a way to amplify, but also a way to reveal further information about what allowed success (De

Jong & Berg, 2013; Young, 2009). The motivation for using compliments in SFBT should not be kindness, but rather should be motivated by what the client reveals (Hanton, 2011 and De Jong & Berg, 2013). If the compliment is grounded in reality, and delivered authentically, it can be an effective way to amplify strengths and to notice what is working (De Jong and Berg, 2013). Hanton (2011) points out the effectiveness of compliments when they come from someone considered to be objective (such as a counsellor), as opposed to the likelihood that when coming from someone close (such as a parent or friend), they are ignored.

Solution Focused Narrative Therapy

Linda Metcalf (2017) has constructed a framework that combines elements of narrative therapy with SFBT in what is called solution focused narrative therapy (SFNT). In describing how the blended model works she outlines 21 constructs, and while several of these already apply to SFBT, such as a 'keeping track of exceptions' and having a 'not-knowing stance', there are some that provide a different approach. There are two SFNT constructs relevant to bullying and adolescents.

Re-description

SFNT allows exploration of how a problem is impacting the client and focuses on how they describe themselves through a process called 're-description' which is a technique used "to help clients describe how they present themselves in their world, understand how that might have a ripple effect, and proceed to generate a new self-concept and improved relationships beyond the clinical setting" (Metcalf, 2017, p. 14).

Effects of the problem story

SFNT allows a client to consider the impact a problem has had on their life, and in light of this to create a preferred future. The idea that the client is encouraged to understand the problem seems to be privileging their knowledge of themselves and what seems a natural desire to understand the impact of a negative experience.

Solution Focused Brief Therapy and Bullying

When looking at SFBT in relation to working with students experiencing bullying there is very little relevant New Zealand research. There is also a lack of research relating to work with individual students, so I have had to broaden my scope to include group work (Young & Holdorf, 2003). I will begin with the limited New Zealand research before I look at the work of Rhodes and Ajmal (1995) who were the first to bring SFBT to the school setting (Young & Holdorf, 2003). I will then explore the work of Sue Young before finally taking a brief look at the most recent studies showing the application of SFBT in schools to combat bullying.

In my search for literature around the use of SFBT when working with bullying in New Zealand schools I used the keywords 'SFBT or Solution Focused Brief Therapy' and 'New Zealand or NZ or Aotearoa' with the added key words of 'bullying or bully' to search the databases from Psychology and Education including PsycINFO, CINAHL, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) and Education source. I also used the same key words in the generic Library Catalogue and UC Research Repository. I was able to locate research about the use of SFBT in schools outside of New Zealand and also found articles about bullying in New Zealand, but only one article was relevant to all (Banks, 1999).

In her role as a school counsellor Banks (1999) was asked to deal with what was being identified as a problem with bullying in the school. Having identified the Year 8 students as the most problematic in the school, Banks initially surveyed all 97 of them to identify the likely ‘bullies’ and to establish what the students themselves deemed ‘bullying’ (Banks, 1999). After identifying the eight most commonly named ‘bullies’ Banks worked with this group over the course of four weeks with one session per week using SFBT skills including that of scaling, the miracle question and identifying exceptions and then building on these (Banks, 1999). The use of SFBT was attributed to having helped provide a positive and practical approach to negative behaviour that students could engage with (Banks, 1999). After the four-week intervention participants celebrated completion and six months later when another survey was administered to the same year level it indicated bullying behaviour had decreased overall (Banks, 1999, p. 82). From the initial intervention group, two students were identified as still bullying, however their rate of bullying had reduced by half and the other six were not mentioned at all (Banks, 1999). This research demonstrates the successful use of SFBT when working in schools dealing with bullying. The lack of a victim voice is a limitation as is the fact that it is not repeated with another group. It is not possible to attribute the positive result six months later entirely to the SFBT work, given many other things could have occurred in that time. The lack of further research into this approach since 1999 is surprising given what appear to be positive results, and supports the need for more practice-based SFBT research.

Rhodes and Ajmal (1995) contributed to the literature on SFBT through their book “Solution Focused Thinking in Schools”, as well as journal articles (Rhodes 1993; Ajmal & Rhodes, 1995). They describe various ways that SFBT can apply in the school context. The chapter most relevant to my research was titled “From Conflict to Co-operation”, and dealt with student behaviour (Rhodes & Ajmal, 1995, p. 31). This chapter did not specifically look at the area of bullying, but rather working with students

who were getting close to being excluded from school if their behaviour didn't improve. The approach outlined in the book and journal articles (Rhodes, 1993; Ajmal & Rhodes, 1995) involved working with the student therapeutically as well as consulting with parents, teachers and school management. Initially this didn't seem to be entirely relevant to my work with victims of bullying, however I noticed that in the case studies, most of the students presented with some sense of victimhood, such as the case of Brian who was lacking in confidence and had a "feeling of being victimised by circumstances outside his control" (Rhodes & Ajmal, 1995, p. 51). The evident lack of agency demonstrated by Brian was addressed with the use of SFBT, which allowed him to discuss things he could do in his life to bring about change. The authors noted Brian's evident increase in confidence at subsequent sessions, and his own assertion that "people can help you but you have got to help yourself" (Rhodes & Ajmal, 1995, p. 54). The authors noted that the situations they stepped into were presented in the context of failure and that by using SFBT they could assist in telling a different story "which emphasises the skills, strengths and resources of the people involved" (Rhodes & Ajmal, 1995, p. 55). They noted that in most cases there emerged clear exceptions that they were able to affirm and that this was a core aspect to their work (Rhodes & Ajmal, 1995).

Sue Young (1998) helped to develop and refine the Support Group Approach when she was working with The Special Educational Needs Support Service Anti-Bullying Project in Kingston upon Hull, supporting schools with referrals for bullying in the mid 1990's. This approach grew from and is an extension of the No Blame Approach, which was developed in the early 1990's (Maines & Robinson, 1991). A key difference was the use of SFBT in the Support Group Approach which meant the victims feelings were not as emphasised as in the No Blame Approach, allowing more focus on exceptions and change rather than dwelling in the problem (Young, 1998). The approach involves an initial interview with the victim of bullying where they are reassured and guided to create a support group

(including the bully and bystanders) that will meet separately from them and be tasked with helping them 'feel happier' in school (Young, 1998). The support group then meets to discuss ways to help the victim in a non-judgemental atmosphere, where they are asked to offer suggestions and report back in one week, with the victim and parents also checking in the following week to give their feedback (Young, 1998). The weekly check-ins are continued until the situation is considered resolved according to the victim. The fact that the solution can be found without being concerned with the problem is deemed incredibly helpful in a school setting where the process of establishing exactly what has been happening is extremely complex (Young, 1998). "It is powerful and effective but gentle – just as an anti-bullying response should be. In the best tradition of conflict resolution, the strategy provides a win-win outcome" (Young, 1998, p. 38). The project measured the success of the support group approach from the perspective of the victim and over a two-year period, involving 55 cases, found 80% to have immediate success, 14% delayed success and in 6% of cases limited success where the victim was re-referred for bullying by different students (Young, 1998, p. 36). Of the 55 cases, only 4 were in secondary schools and those had only a 50% success rate.

Working as an outside agency, The Anti-Bullying Project (mentioned above), explored working specifically with individual referrals, without the support group (Young & Holdorf, 2003). Despite espousing the undoubted and significant success of the Support Group Approach, the authors deemed it most successful in a primary school setting and noted some limitations in the secondary school setting (Young and Holdorf, 2003). The limitations ranged from having victims that simply do not want anyone else involved in an intervention, difficulty coordinating the support group in a secondary setting with different classes for each pupil, to the mere fact that as students get older the risk of violence increases and involving the bully could simply be too risky (Young and Holdorf, 2003). The current study is situated in a high school setting, making these limitations important

considerations, while also offering useful evidence for using SFBT with victims of bullying on an individual basis. The authors looked at 92 students who had more than one session in this study and found that the intervention was successful for 92% of them, based on the students own judgement that things had improved to a point where they needed no further support (Young and Holdorf, 2003). In describing their approach with individuals, Young and Holdorf (2003) outline the SFBT strategies of non-problem talk, scaling, exception finding, the miracle question and giving compliments and note that when done effectively these can create a greater sense of agency in the student and have a high success rate (Young & Holdorf, 2003). The authors discuss how these strategies do not “presuppose any judgement about the cause of the difficulties, which so often takes place beyond the view of adults and is not open to ‘proof’. Practitioners do not have to label pupils ‘victims’ or ‘bullies’ – if a pupil feels in need of help, that is enough.” (Young and Holdorf, 2003, p. 281). It is considered necessary to avoid using the term ‘bullying’ as it “suggests a judgement has been made on the nature and causes of the problem” (Young, 1998, p. 34). The context of Young and Holdorf’s research is very different from the current study, but offered a comparative therapeutic approach to working with a victim of bullying. There was little exploration of the experience of the intervention for the referred student, and my research is able to provide further data in this area.

In her book, *Solution Focused Schools: Anti-bullying and Beyond*, Young (2009) takes the principles of SFBT and demonstrates how they can be applied in the wider context of a whole school. Rather than a focus on what the school is failing to do, by applying a focus on what they do well already and what they hope to do in the future, Young suggests this is a far more effective approach to dealing with bullying issues (Young, 2009). The ability to move away from the issue of bullying seems to fit with SFBT, which is about the solution and not the problem. Young (2016) refers to her initial approach to

anti-bullying and her naïve belief that it was the opposite of bullying, “so I came up with as many activities as I could that promoted friendship and support” (Young, 2016, p. 59). While it may have been naïve and different from the trend of raising awareness of bullying, Young acknowledges that it seems her initial idea was the right one and has led to her finding a fit with SFBT (Young, 2016).

More recently, Kvarme, Aabo and Saetern (2013; 2016), have investigated an SFBT Support Group Approach and found it to be successful in improving the experience of both the victim and the participants supporting them. The research took place in 2011 and 2012 and involved 19 students aged between 12 and 13 years with three of those identifying as being bullied and the remaining participants making up the support groups (Kvarme et al., 2013). Referencing the work of Sue Young, this research followed a very similar procedure to that detailed in her work with the victim being interviewed separately to the support group and a series of SFBT questions being used. Similarly, the intervention took place weekly until the bullying stopped and this was between four to six weeks (Kvarme, et al., 2013). Interviews with the victim were conducted after the support group sessions were complete and then again three months later to see if the results remained after a period without intervention (Kvarme et al., 2013). The bullied participants reported significant improvement in their situation with bullying stopping (and not returning in the timeframe of this study) having feelings of increased safety, inclusion and visibility (Kvarme, et al., 2013). The support group participants reported that the process led to an increased sense of belonging and self-esteem, but that there were some challenges for some who felt they may lose friends and that the victim wasn't entirely blameless or in need of support (Kvarme et al., 2013). It is not known whether the effects were due to the SFBT itself, the support group, or a combination of both of these things, however the authors acknowledge the importance of SFBT, stating “this approach acknowledges that people can change, and presumes that moving from being a victim to taking a stand creates optimism, self-

belief, and trust that a situation can be altered” (Kvarme et al. 2013, p. 418). The current study allows consideration of SFBT, without a support group, allowing recognised effects to be attributed to the SFBT alone.

As technology has changed, the methods of bullying have also changed to include cyber-bullying. A relatively recent article described the use of SFBT in a pilot project at a Texas public school where the aim was to increase empathy in those taking part in cyber-bullying (Hicks, Clair & Berry, 2016). The authors described the programme as “combin(ing) solution-focused brief therapy with dramatic re-enactments of cyber-bullying scenarios to build empathy and self-concept as well as improve problem-solving and empathic responses to victims” (Hicks et al., 2016, p. 386). Despite this pilot project only including 25 students, from the comments of participants in the programme and observations from the school counsellor, the authors report that the programme was effective in changing student understanding and behaviour (Hicks et al., 2016). While my research is aimed at the victims of bullying, this article has been useful to highlight the impact on victims of cyberbullying by highlighting its increasing prevalence and the evolving ways in which it is carried out (Hicks et al., 2016). The use of a ‘stealth’ mode or ‘catfishing’ that can hide perpetrators identity, the compounding of a hurtful post when it gets multiple shares and likes, and the unnerving idea of someone ‘lurking’ through individuals social media accounts, are such examples and were useful for my understanding (Hicks et al., 2016). The idea that the victim is prompted to retaliate which can lead to an ongoing cycle of harmful cyber-posts has highlighted the potentially blurred lines between victim and bully and the potential to end the cycle by refraining from this understandable impulse (Hicks et al., 2016).

It is evident that SFBT can be used for the benefit of the victim, in order to move from victimhood to a sense of agency, and for the benefit of the bully, through building empathy and being positively supported. While I am not planning to work with bullies in my research; I am also aware that the line between victim and bully is not always clear and it is encouraging to see that SFBT proves useful in both situations.

Conclusion

In this review I have brought together the relevant literature as relates to my research. SFBT plays a central role and I have provided a summary of its philosophy, assumptions and key techniques as pertinent to this research. I have reported on SFBT research as it relates to adolescents and bullying and findings from this research suggest SFBT is an effective and timely therapy. The research has provided detailed descriptions of different aspects of SFBT; however, the interaction of client and practitioner has not been explored in any detail, with a lack of qualitative practice-based case studies. While limited in scope, the current study aims to provide richer detail and add to the body of knowledge in the area of SFBT and bullying.

Considering the implications of the literature I have focused my research around one overall question:

How does solution-focused counselling influence adolescents who report experiencing bullying?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction:

In this chapter I outline the process by which this research was carried out, and the ways in which I sought to answer the research question. I begin with my methodology, looking at qualitative, practice-based research and how case study design worked in this context. I go on to explain the practical aspects of the research, including how I selected participants, gathered data and then analysed it in accordance with a narrative inquiry. Outlining how ethical considerations were addressed and how I ensured trustworthiness in data collection follows, before finally I detail the way that I have presented my findings in the following two chapters.

Methodology

Qualitative Research

SFBT is a post-modern therapy rooted in social constructionism. Given my data collection has SFBT as its foundation, it stands that the epistemology underpinning my research is social constructionism. In keeping with this perspective, I recognise that my research has been affected by my own beliefs and assumptions (such as the idea that my participants will present with a lack of agency) as well as my interaction with and response to the participants, which underpins my data collection.

Qualitative research places an emphasis on the individual story, allowing a participant's unique experience to be incorporated rather than being either ignored or concealed, as may happen in quantitative approaches (Cromby, 2012). There is a significant amount of quantitative research in the area of bullying (Evans, 2017), and this can be informative for the purposes of policy making and

news reporting. A qualitative approach, however, privileges the individuals' lived experience and therefore deepens our understanding of the issues for those who have experienced bullying, which allows exploration of effective interventions (Mishna, 2004).

Jane Speedy (2008) explains that qualitative research in the field of counselling often creates more questions than providing traditional ideas of evidence or answers. She goes on to say that it is "best suited to small intimate studies and provides descriptive, evocative evidence of the particularities of conversational practice. It illustrates and suggests but it does not explain or evaluate" (Speedy, 2008, p. 142). This methodology fits with the exploratory nature of my research, which focuses on the unfolding narrative cocreated during counselling sessions.

Practice Based Research

Practice-based research enables the close examination of therapeutic sessions in a real-life setting. Given my research question, and the current state of the field of research, practice-based research was the best fit. This form of research encourages a high degree of reflexivity and takes place in the same environment that therapy occurs, making it not only more realistic but more applicable for future practice (Nielson, 2015). Undertaking practice -based research allowed me to consider what I was bringing into the interaction with the participant and reflect on my own choices and actions as well as those of the participant. My own emotional responses, assumptions and attitude were reflected on in order to inform and enrich the research, as opposed to proving an obstacle (Bager-Charleson, 2014). Practice-based research works well with the dual role of counsellor-researcher and brings research and practice closer together than other forms of research (Henton, 2012). By being

sensitive to the complexities of my dual role of counsellor-researcher it was my hope to ensure the client-participant was not disadvantaged and that they might gain some benefit, such as a sense of helping, and an opportunity for personal growth (Fleet et al., 2016). I considered this to be the most appropriate form for my research to take in order to gain insight into both my own practice and the experience of the participants. Hollway and Jefferson (2008, p. 3) express the need for the reality of life to be part of the research process when they state:

“Research is only a more formalised and systematic way of knowing about people, but in the process it seems to have lost much of the subtlety and complexity that we use, often as a matter of course, in everyday knowing. We need to bring some of this everyday subtlety into the research process”.

By learning more about the clients I see in a realistic setting, I am able to increase my knowledge of myself and my practice, and present research that reflects this.

Case Study Design

Case study research with the counsellor as researcher is gaining credibility as a way to “generate(d) knowledge in the therapeutic context” (Fleet et al., 2016, p. 339). It involves working in an authentic context and building a detailed record of the therapeutic process, in order to identify and examine therapeutic change (Henton, 2012). This design fitted with both the collection and analysis of my data, with researcher reflexivity considered essential to the process of gathering, interpreting and presenting data (Etherington & Bridges, 2011). It is noted by Creswell (2007, p. 74) that a case study design works well “when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases”. The two cases in my research are clearly identifiable in that they are both centred around a student experiencing being bullied, with the

boundaries that exist in the high-school setting and with the use of SFBT counselling. Case study design encourages close examination of how the case interacts with its contexts and is able to provide a sense of what actually took place for both the client and researcher (Stake, 1995). Informed by this I have structured my findings with each case presented independently, with transcript to include both client and counsellor voice, and explanation and analysis alongside.

Method

Setting

I conducted my research at the secondary school where I was an intern school counsellor. The sessions with my participants were structured within the same parameters as my normal counselling, meaning the same physical space and keeping to the structure of having sessions within the timeframe of a school period, and adhering to the existing school policies. Working in the school two days per week allowed me to become familiar with the environment and when it came time to conduct my research, I felt comfortable working in the school. The purpose of the placement was to become more proficient as an SFBT counsellor, which would at times be measured through recordings, observations and reflection. It was for this reason I worked in a solution-focused way with all my clients and in doing so came to see it as an effective approach that has continued to be embedded in my approach to counselling. For the counselling sessions that formed the data in this research, there was undoubtedly a focus on the bullying and similarly a focus on working in a solution-focused way to address it.

Recruitment and eligibility

Given the sensitivity of my topic, I wanted to ensure anonymity of my participants, and minimise the risk. Having considered speaking at the school assembly, my concerns that this could create a sense of vulnerability to those experiencing bullying meant that I chose to recruit via email so that potential participants could consider their involvement privately. I also had a poster on display in the counselling department waiting area with my email contact. When I hadn't received many responses initially, I spoke to the pastoral team about the possibility of referral for any students deemed appropriate for this research, who would be willing to take part. Those students were then informed about the research and provided with my details should they wish to take part, in order to ensure they felt no pressure to take part.

I made it clear that taking part in this research was not reporting bullying and while I was happy to assist with this in my capacity as a school counsellor, it was not the intention of my research. For a student to be eligible for the research the presenting issue needed to be relating to bullying that was impacting them at the time of counselling. For those where this was not the case, I offered them counselling outside of the research. Similarly, a student would become ineligible if the problems they presented with were so severe as to need intervention from an outside agency. Such intervention would likely be as a result of suicidal risk at which point therapeutic work around bullying would no longer be appropriate. While I did not need to exclude clients in this way, I had a plan to do so to ensure the mental health of my participants remained the highest priority.

I did not wish to be too prescriptive with the number of sessions each participant had, given that the intention of SFBT is to finish when the client feels they no longer need to return (Hanton, 2011). To

this end, I did not make it an expectation of participants to come for a set number of sessions, however I let them know that for research purposes I would be recording and using up to six sessions per participant. I determined that six sessions would provide sufficient data and could be conducted within the time constraints of the school term.

Participants

Despite initially recruiting and recording sessions with five participants, it became apparent that I had too much data to analyse it meaningfully and therefore I proceeded with just two participants for the purposes of this research project. Sam (pseudonym) was a Year 9 male and Ana (pseudonym) a Year 9 female, both in their first year at high school. Sam came for five sessions; at which time he was comfortable ending the therapy. Ana came for six sessions and also felt comfortable ending the therapy at this time. Further description of the participants can be found in the findings.

Data collection

I collected four forms of data for this study, which all came from the counselling sessions that took place between myself and the two participants. Using SFBT as I always do, I also kept in mind the work of Young & Holdorf (2003) which reinforced the SFBT techniques I already used and highlighted certain aspects such as not using the term 'bully' or 'victim'. Counselling session audio and video recordings, SFBT client scales, counsellor notes and researcher journal entries all contributed to generating rich and in-depth data for the process of analysis in relation to the research question.

Audio/Visual Recording

After gaining consent to record the counselling sessions with participants I was able to collect this data that I later transcribed for analysis. When a client was comfortable with visual recording I did so, however if they expressed discomfort, I used only audio and kept notes of body language and other visual cues. These recordings were the predominant form of data collection and allowed continued access to what occurred during our sessions. I gave both students and parents an information sheet as part of the informed consent process, providing detailed information about exactly what I intended to do with the data, and their rights in relation to this, and this was signed by both students and parents prior to beginning any data collection (refer appendix B & C).

In Session Scaling

During any SFBT counselling session it is likely that scaling questions will be asked, and it is my usual practice to frequently use them throughout sessions, asking clients to place themselves on a scale from 1 through to 10. These scales were related to a variety of things such as a specific issue, relationship, or the participants confidence or likelihood of taking a particular action. Using scales allows clients to situate their experience over time, benchmark progress, create shared meaning and form goals (Hanton, 2011). There was one scale that was referred to in every session to allow a means of establishing progress, and the first example of this is during the second session with Sam at the beginning of the **crux** section.

In Session Notes

It is my usual counselling practice to make notes when I am with a client and at the school where I was working these would form part of the pastoral notes for the students I worked with. These notes

are always open for clients to see and usually include lists of client strengths, exceptions and scales. I kept a copy of these notes for the purposes of my research, and these were helpful when going over the recordings of sessions to remind me of what I noticed at the time.

Researcher Journal

The final form of data collection was my researcher reflective journal. I tried to write this at the conclusion of each counselling session and at varying times throughout the analysis process.

Reflexivity is an important aspect of counselling research and I endeavoured to be as reflexive as possible, in order to engage fully and make the most meaning from this process (Etherington, 2001).

In ensuring it was a continuous process through my research it helped me acknowledge and account for any bias or judgements that existed or developed (Fleet et al., 2016). There were times when I had another client immediately after a participant, and in these instances my reflections were not always immediate, but even when only a few lines I was usually able put down some of the basic thoughts, emotions and reactions I had to the different sessions. These notes helped me to re-situate myself with my response and engagement with the process both when I worked with the participant again and also when I looked over them during the analysis process.

Ethical considerations

Client consent

The ethics and obligations around client consent were made clear to participants and ensured that my counselling and research was informed and guided by the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) Code of Ethics guidelines which relate to research. Guideline 11.2 requires giving enough information about the research for the consent to be given freely, as well as making clear

how the information will be used and giving the participant a right to withdraw (NZAC, 2014). Having gained approval from the Human Ethics Committee (refer Appendix E), I distributed information sheets and consent forms (refer Appendix A, B, C & D) to all the relevant parties and these formed the basis of my informed consent process. Lieblich (1996, as cited in Clandinin & Murphy, 2007) noted the importance of continuing to gain consent as the relationship changes, regardless of legal obligation and to keep checking what will be published is correct and appropriately anonymous. I ensured that I revisited consent throughout the process and particularly if a participant has disclosed things that could potentially change their comfort with the process.

Dual role of counsellor/researcher

Being aware of the potential for a conflicting agenda between my role as a counsellor and researcher I endeavoured to place the client's needs at the forefront and prioritised the role of counsellor (Fleet et al., 2016). This potential conflict is addressed in NZAC Guideline 11.4a (2002), which states that the counselling relationship always be given priority over the research purposes. I found the tension in the two roles became more pronounced when I felt that a session was not going well. In such situations I was aware of a pressure that would not have been there had I not been concerned with my research. When I noticed these moments, I tried to refocus onto the client, however it was not always easy. In order to further mitigate this tension, I gave clear information to the participants about the dual role and ensured I identified if I was moving from one role to another. There were times it was clear that the participants had concerns around maintaining anonymity and at these times I would move into the researcher role to prioritise addressing that (Fleet et al., 2016). I also made it clear that if the participant would like to have further sessions, outside of those recorded for my research, that I was able to do this.

Confidentiality

Ensuring confidentiality is vitally important to avoid harm to the participant (Fleet et al., 2009, p. 341). Given the sensitive self-disclosures that took place it was of paramount importance to protect the participants identity. I provided them an opportunity to check any inclusions in the research to ensure they were comfortable with the level of anonymity and had a chance to change identifying features (Etherington, 1996). I used pseudonyms, changed or adapted specific details such as locations and events, and omitted any transcript that was in any way too revealing. Given the volume of data in case study research it is considered difficult to maintain anonymity and “holding a state of ethical mindfulness throughout and adopting role-fluency help to manage this challenge” (Fleet et al., 2009, p. 340). I took steps beyond those asked of me by the participant when writing up the findings to ensure they would not be identified.

Mitigating risk

I was working within the parameters and school policies that existed in my role, including relating to the issue of bullying. This included ensuring I made it clear to participants how they could go about reporting any bullying they were experiencing and assisting them in doing this if required. It also meant that if a student presented risk of harm to themselves or others that I must bring in a more senior counsellor for support and the candidate in this instance would be excluded from the study. Another way that risk was mitigated was through clinical supervision that was separate to research supervision. This allowed a space where I was able to openly discuss the participants and have an

experienced counsellor ensure I was doing the best for the participants, separate from the research, ensuring I was not compromising my duty of care for the sake of the current study.

Trustworthiness

Elliot Mishler expressed his concerns around how certain aspects of a story are chosen to represent a larger body of data (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007). Stating “we don’t require people when they publish things to provide some description of how they went about selecting what they’ve presented as their data”, Mishler considered the lack of transparency around data selection to impact the trustworthiness of the data (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p. 6). Given the very nature of narrative research, it is not appropriate to look for reliability in the sense of repeatability of results or consistency (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008), but rather the reliability can come from demonstrating in a precise fashion the steps taken to analyse data and to give evidence for this and explanations of how it was interpreted. I have done this by explaining my process of data selection and how I have engaged with and analysed it.

By providing participants with an opportunity to look at the presentation of findings this provides a further layer of trustworthiness. The accountability of knowing that the findings would be scrutinised by the participants ensured that I was presenting honest and reliable data.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis allows for an understanding of the client, their story and the ways in the which the counselling process has been helpful. It provided the framework to look at my own experience as the

counsellor and researcher and make sense of this. It acknowledges the relationship between researcher and participant and the way in which this not only impacts the participant but also can provide the researcher with new knowing and insight into their own life (Creswell, 2007).

Underpinned by a social constructionist perspective, the meaning that each participant took from our sessions was co-constructed through our conversations and there was no attempt to locate the 'truth' of what was said. Rather in keeping with this perspective, I have recognised that "client perceptions and definitions occur in context" (De Jong & Berg 2013, p. 369), and are likely to change as they interact with others.

Clandinin and Connolly (2000, p. 20), describe narrative research as "stories lived and told", and this was a good fit for my research because I wished to tell the story of my client's experience through the therapeutic process. Narrative analysis recognises that an individual's story is co-constructed as it is told and should be considered in relation to the social context, the people involved, and in collaboration with the participant (Creswell, 2007). Kim Etherington (2001, p. 121), explains that narrative analysis can "assist marginalised people to reclaim their voices and to value their stories alongside the dominant discourses". Given that the participants in my research were already in a position of marginalisation, this was a good fit. Etherington goes on to say that a narrative researcher will allow the participant to be the expert on their own life and to attend to the issue of power in the relationship, avoiding any idea of being an expert (Etherington, 2001). This aligned with the SFBT stance of "leading from one step behind" (De Jong & Berg, 2013, p. 20).

As in a novel, the process of narrative analysis involves parts of a story and aspects such as a plot, chronological elements of past, present and future and setting (Creswell, 2007). In the process of analysing the data I re-visited the participants stories many times, looking at chronology to provide order. I placed an emphasis on the past, present and future, as well as identifying any themes as they related to the individual participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This process allowed me to

immerse myself in the data and gain a rich understanding of the participant's narrative, that would continue to develop as the analysis process progressed. I co-constructed the findings and made various interpretations, and through the reflexive process of constantly questioning my meaning making, I ensured I developed trustworthy findings.

I engaged with the data to construct an emerging narrative of the research findings in relation to the research question, and to allow this to inform my direction in terms of how the findings were presented. I drew on Speedy's (2008, p. 138) reference to 'writing as inquiry' and the idea that the way in which the research is written up is an opportunity to pay tribute to the participants and the process, to be descriptive and engaging and be prepared to find new knowing in the process of writing and re-writing:

"Writing as inquiry is an attempt to capture the readers' attention and engage them in conversation. It assumes and articulates a reflexive, situated researcher stance, but does not necessarily dwell there. It assumes and expresses a curiosity or even a thirst for knowledge about the contents of the study, but has no illusions that this might speak for itself".

While I fear I have not been as creative as I would have liked, I found the process of writing and re-writing to be a key part of the analysis process and one that frequently provided me with new understanding or curiosity.

In order to determine how the counselling sessions were helpful for my participants, I looked to Young and Holdorf (2003), who offered a way of evaluating counselling sessions for research. This involved using the student's own rating on a general scale, that was referred to in every session, and any movement up the scale was considered an indication the counselling was helping (Young and Holdorf, 2003). I applied this method of referring to the same scale each session, and while the intention of this was not primarily to measure efficacy, it allowed a simple way of seeing progress.

Choosing to transcribe every session was an intentional decision and one that formed a key part of the analysis process. Fleet et al., (2016, p. 340) recommends doing this for two reasons, stating “first, the researcher will maintain the state of ethical mindfulness (Bond, 2000) when transcribing data, and, second, the researcher will immerse him or herself in the data, which is a necessary first step in qualitative analysis (Mcleod, 2003)”. With regard to the analysis process, this immersion allowed greater access to the data and an ability to work with it more flexibly and responsively.

Hollway and Jefferson (2008) discussed becoming so immersed in the data, to the point of dreaming about the participants. During a period of several months I can attest to thinking more about Sam and Ana than anyone else in my life. My immersion process developed intuitively as I listened to each session of Sam’s three times before transcribing all the sessions in full. Alongside this process, I was creating chronological lists about the use of SFBT skills, plot, and anything else that stood out to me. I began to look at each session individually and after locating a beginning, middle and end, I found portions of transcript to represent each part. I continued to write reflective notes about the process and began to analyse what was emerging. Guided by the research question, I discovered different ways to classify the various parts of each session and ended up with something close to what is presented in the findings. Feeling that I now had a formula of sorts, I undertook the same process with Ana.

Presentation of Findings

What follows is my attempt to bring together what occurred in 11 sessions with two participants. The beginning of each participant’s story, for the purposes of this research, is not the bullying they experienced. Rather it is the decision they made to take part in this research and acknowledge the

impact of bullying on their life. The beginning is also my decision to choose a topic for my research that involved working with young people who are experiencing bullying. One could not have occurred without the other, and I wish to acknowledge this context and its implication on how the story unfolded, which I felt as a constant presence throughout this process. The first session was when the intertwining of our individual stories started, and the findings are my interpretation of that story.

Working from and believing in a social constructionist perspective has meant I am acutely aware of the power I have had and the influence and control over the analysis that follows. After initially wrestling with the level of influence I had on the process of data analysis and presentation of findings and wanting to let the participants' voices speak for themselves, I have realised that is not possible. This aligns with Hollway and Jefferson (2008, p. 70), who make it clear that they disagree with any analysis that seeks to "iron out inconsistencies, contradictions and puzzles". I found it immensely challenging to select and discard aspects of each session and yet the process of doing so became the catalyst for new understanding. While wanting to ensure my research has a high level of trustworthiness, rather than trying to remove this influence, I have attempted to be as reflexive as possible and recognise and justify my choices. Etherington (2011), encourages researchers to make their voice part of the research, while recognising that they are no expert on the client's life. It is through my interpretation of the participant's voice, that meaning has been made and while recognising that it is subjective, I have come to appreciate that I can provide further insight and meaning for the reader. Once I embraced this responsibility it became my intention to provide the most accurate representation of the participants and the work we did together. Fleet et al., (2016, p. 342) when discussing the importance of reflexivity noted the importance of having a "questioning attitude when identifying meanings throughout the research process and exploring any possible

influence from his or her values and beliefs” and go on to say the researcher should consider their own assumptions and how they could impact on their research findings.

By presenting each session chronologically, I hope to tell the story of these sessions as they unfolded. I have dedicated a chapter to each participant. The guiding influence, as I have endeavoured to present my findings, has been my research question and what follows is my attempt to connect this to the co-constructed story that unfolded during the sessions. By breaking each session into different parts, it is my hope that the participants story remains the focus, with my analysis of the process adding to the fullness of their story, and the way in which a solution-focused approach was able to bring about change.

Within each session there is a structure that uses storying devices to break up and highlight relevant parts of each session. Metcalf (2017), discussed how she considered different stories, particularly novels, were written in order to provide structure and honour the client’s values. She called it “Storytelling 101” (Metcalf, 2017, p. 64).

For most sessions I begin with a **prologue**, however on occasion this wasn’t necessary if the main piece of transcript was from the very beginning of the session. The intention of including the prologue is to indicate how the participant presented at the start of each session, so that any change that had occurred between sessions or within can be recognised. It was often relevant to the upcoming piece of transcript and at times is presented as transcript and other times summarised.

For each session I have presented a main portion of transcript, which I call the **crux**. The most widely used definition references “the decisive or most important point at issue” (Crux, n.d.), which fits with my intention, however the literary definition offers an interesting and, in my opinion, relevant perspective. Described as “(a) difficult or ambiguous passage in a literary work, upon which

interpretation of the rest of the work depends” (Baldick, 2008), the literary definition highlights the many possible meanings to be made and fits nicely with the idea that there will no answers revealed, and yet it is integral to the rest of the work.

For some sessions I also included a **vignette**. These were included when I felt that there was an added piece of transcript that needed inclusion. Defined as “a short piece of writing, music, acting, etc. that clearly expresses the typical characteristics of something or someone” (Vignette, n.d.), these pieces of transcript were always short but I felt clearly expressed either something important.

Finally, I have the **epilogue**, that represents the way I finished each session. I tried to consistently finish with an opportunity for my participants to tell me anything that might have been helpful from the session. As happens in life, things didn’t always go as intended, however for the most part the epilogue provides a means of seeing the impact of different sessions over time.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS FOR SAM

SESSION 1: “Maybe I could like wake up and instead of being sad, I would be happy”.

Prologue:

I started this session by very intentionally using problem-free talk. This is not specific to SFBT, however it was explained in the work of Young and Holdorf (2003) as an essential way to begin. I have always found it helpful in my own practice in order to help break down any hierarchical construct between myself and the client. I explained to Sam that I wanted to get to know him a little and hoped that my genuine interest in who he was would allow him to recognise that I saw him as more than a client presenting with a problem, or a subject for my research. Sam spoke quietly, taking time to consider his responses and at times seeming that he had more to say. He often responded with a sound such as “mhmm” to signify agreement and at times seemed to find it easier to give an answer when presented with a variety of choices. When it came to his strengths, he found it far easier to see these through the eyes of his friends or family. He reported that he was an overthinker and that the best part of school was hanging out with his friends. As he started to talk about his strengths, I noticed Sam beginning to talk and engage more.

Next, I co-constructed with Sam a scale from 1 to 10 that represented how the bullying was affecting him, with 1 being the worst he could imagine and 10 the best. Looking at where things were for him at present, the highest and lowest points during the year, this scale became a foundation for our work together. He reported that he was a 3.5 currently, that the lowest point this year was a 3 and the highest it had been was a 6.5. When considering his shift from a 3 to a 3.5 it became very clear

that Sam had recently initiated changes in the way he reacted to the hurtful comments he was receiving both in person, over social media and passed to him by friends. It is in keeping with SFBT and considered necessary and helpful to look at progress made already before considering future progress (Shennan, 2014, p. 100). He had stopped reacting overtly to the comments and blocked those people on social media. This demonstrated his willingness to try and bring about a change in his situation. It was evident that these changes had made a big impact on the frequency of the hurtful comments, however it was also clear that this had not had a significant impact on how Sam felt, reflected in a shift of only 0.5 up the scale. This brought to mind the experience of de Shazer and the team at the Brief Family Therapy Centre when they first encountered the power of pre-session change, which is the change that can occur within a client simply by knowing they are going to embark on therapy (De Jong & Berg, 2013). They had a client who was overwhelmed by his situation and yet he also pointed out, in a way that suggested he didn't see any significance, that things had been improving in the days prior to the session (De Shazer, 1988, p. 5). Despite not recognising the changes as significant, it was a focus on those improvements that lead to what De Shazer deemed a successful outcome in three sessions. Similarly, Sam did not seem to be feeling any better despite making what appeared positive changes, and so I tried to focus on those improvements.

While much of this first session was memorable and all of it in some way shaped the emerging therapeutic alliance, there was a specific moment that stuck with me and shaped the way I engaged with my research moving forward. This moment took what had, up until then, been a topic that I felt would be interesting to research, to a different place. I became aware of a responsibility to my participants to not only provide effective counselling, but to produce a meaningful piece of research. This was sparked by hearing Sam talk of what he had endured at his previous school, and I found myself fighting to keep my emotions in check. While not wanting to allow myself to express this

overtly in that moment, I also wanted to make it clear to him that what he had been subjected to was outrageous and that being upset by it was understandable.

Reflective Journal (immediately after the session):

Despite knowing he was not fully comfortable, I had a strong sense of connection and I felt a very strong emotional response. This took me by surprise, and I had to work to suppress tears and to keep my voice steady. I felt a sense of helplessness at not being able to have stopped what had already happened to Sam and it triggered in me a fear for what could happen to my own children who are only starting out on a school journey that I have been repeatedly reminded of late can be terribly hard.

This was an important part of Sam's story and it felt important that he shared it with me. It signified to me that he was placing trust in me and in our therapeutic relationship. For Sam to see that his story affected me and that I was empathetic to his situation, I believe allowed him to know that I would treat not just him but his story with respect. This moment went on to stick with me throughout the remainder of my research as a connection to the meaning and importance of the topic.

Crux:

The transcript I have included here begins with the asking of the miracle question (MQ). When reflecting immediately afterwards this stood out as the most important part, the crux of this session. Sam revealed that he had been subjected to a hurtful comment just in his previous class and while he had not reacted overtly, he was affected by it and kept thinking about it. This felt like a move away from the problem and it was while responding to this question that I felt Sam had a moment of realisation that resulted in a lasting change in his perspective. Refer Appendix F for full text of the miracle question with Sam.

- Amanda** Can you think of anything that might be different if you woke up and this problem wasn't there anymore?
- Sam** Maybe I could like wake up and instead of being sad, I would be happy.
- Amanda** Right, happy. That is awesome. So, what would that be like?
- Sam** I would probably have better days at school cause then I would like I could actually have fun. And I would be making an impact on my parents, because they know I am always sad, and they are trying to help me.
- Amanda** So what would your parents notice in the morning for instance, if you woke up happy, what's the first encounter you would have with them normally in the morning? Do they come into your room and say wake up it's time for school or?...
- Sam** Um, maybe when, cause my Dad has been at home recently. But maybe when he is in the kitchen, and then I come out and instead of being sad and not talking I'll talk.
- Amanda** Ah. So, he would really notice something if you came into the kitchen and spoke to your Dad. What would you say?
- Sam** Um, I don't know. Like this morning I was kinda happy when I got out of bed and he noticed that. Because yesterday I had, like yesterday was just really fun. Because I was playing video games with my friends and it was a double XP weekend, so we were just like playing the whole time pretty much.

The use of the miracle question was an important tool that allowed Sam to describe his desire for happiness and what that would be like. After I described in detail what the miracle question was and how I wanted Sam to relate to it he was easily able to imagine how he would feel when he woke, stating simply “(m)aybe I could like wake up and instead of being sad, I would be happy”. This response was a clear demonstration that Sam understood and responded to the question in a way that allowed him to consider the change he wanted. It then allowed further development of what that looked like.

I would probably have better days at school cause then I would like I could actually have fun, and I would be making an impact on my parents, because they know I am always sad, and they are trying to help me.

The way that he was able to readily describe what being happy would be like, indicated to me that he was really thinking about this in a meaningful way, and seeing the change he wanted. Explaining the use of the miracle question Young and Holdorf (2003) stated that “(t)he more detail that can be elicited, the more likely the pupil will learn from their own answers about their own solutions (p. 275). It seemed obvious to me during this part of the session that Sam was learning from his own answers and constructing meaning from them that was individual to his own situation. As I continued to ask questions, we co-constructed what became the foundation of the work we did together.

In the book *More than Miracles* (de Shazer et al., 2007), Harry Korman explains what it is like when he sees a client virtually experience the miracle, stating that while other techniques can be as effective, there are certain reactions to the miracle question that cannot be achieved without it.

When it comes to the reaction of Sam to the miracle question, I related to the experience of Korman when he said, “It’s a humbling experience and one that often inspires awe in clients’ possibilities” (de Shazer et al., 2007, p. 178). The dialogue continues as I try to elicit further detail around the identified exception.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Amanda | So yesterday was a day where you were kind of happy and that lead to you this morning um, coming out into the kitchen and you kind of were a bit happier do you think? Did you speak to Dad this morning? |
| Sam | Mhmm |
| Amanda | What did you say? |
| Sam | I don’t know. I wasn’t really like... |

- Amanda** Just kind of like chat?
- Sam** Yeah.
- Amanda** And, the fact that you are talking is just a sign that you are in a good mood?
- Sam** Yeah, like my Dad noticed straight away, when I walked out, before I even said anything.
- Amanda** Really?
- Sam** So, maybe I like, look different when I'm happy?
- Amanda** Yeah?
- Sam** Mmm.
- Amanda** And, what did he say when he noticed?
- Sam** He said, "you look happy today "and then I said "yeah"

Use of the miracle question allowed Sam to see not just what he wanted but what he was already doing. By thinking about the miracle in the context of a normal day, and the everyday aspects of that, it made accessing his preferred future easier. Sam noticed that a few aspects of this day had just taken place that morning after an enjoyable weekend. He had been happier and joked around with his parents. By looking at his preferred future in the context of his current situation, it allowed him to see that a recent experience (or exception) had put him a step closer to that miracle. This process of exception finding is embedded in the SFBT approach and was part of the work by Young and Holdorf (2003) that inspired my work in this area.

Relationship questions, which are an important aspect of SFBT, proved to be important when working with Sam. Allowing him to consider his situation from the perspective of a loved one, in this case his Dad, it gave Sam enough distance from the situation to see a different perspective. Shennan

(2014, p. 60), describes relationship questions as “invaluable in eliciting tangible and observable details” and goes on to say that in recognising another’s perspective, it can add significantly to “the richness of a description, and to the range of possibilities for action”. Through his Dad’s eyes Sam could see that he was making progress and was indeed happier, even considering the different way he must physically look when he is happier.

In the following piece of transcript, I encourage Sam to explore what his Dad noticed and the impact it had on him.

- Amanda** And, when he said that, how did that make you feel when he said that? (long pause) Did it make you feel? Were you glad that he noticed?
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** Yeah?
- Sam** I can’t really remember what I feel. It is actually kind of sad, because... (long pause) ...never mind.
- Amanda** It’s okay.
- Sam** I don’t know.
- Amanda** What makes you sad?
- Sam** I don't know I have just never really...like I feel like I’m a bad child, I’m a bad kid.
- Amanda** So thinking about the fact that your Dad noticed you feeling happy, is making you feel bad that he doesn’t see that very often.
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** Yeah, that kind of makes me feel like you are an awesome kid, because you want your Dad to be happy for you. Some kids if their dad said you look happy, would be like “shut up” but you want him to feel that for you.
- Sam** Mhmm (fighting back tears)

Amanda That makes me, I mean, from my perspective, he is very lucky that you care that much about him, and he clearly cares a huge amount about you. Um, and how awesome that yesterday was such a great day and that he noticed today.

My initial question during the above exchange would have been more solution-focused had I asked, “what difference did that make?”, however it still allowed Sam to consider the effect of this exception, which in this case was his Dad seeing him happy (Shennan, 2014, p. 82). This was one of those amazing moments when as a counsellor it was possible to see a shift within a client; a change of perspective that brings about a realisation or deeper understanding of something. As Sam fought to hold back his tears it seemed to me that he was starting to realise just how worried about him his father had been, and this seemed to amplify to him the impact his current situation was having on those he loved. In that moment Sam seemed hesitant to describe how he was feeling, as if I wouldn’t understand, however by allowing Sam to express how he felt I was then able to notice and compliment the clear love and concern he had for his father. This use of complimenting is a fundamental skill in SFBT and an efficient way to highlight client strengths while also growing a sense of hopefulness and confidence in clients (De Jong & Berg, 2013, p. 38-9). In this instance with Sam I believe both hope and confidence needed boosting, particularly after considering the pain he had caused his Dad. I was also able to point out and remind Sam that things were already getting better because his Dad had in fact recognised a change in him.

Given the **crux** started with the miracle question, there was far less imagining of a preferred future and far more exploration of exceptions than I expected, yet I still considered this to be the most significant and helpful part of the session. Sam’s first response of waking up and being happy, rather than sad, was profound. While considering his happiness in the future context could have been helpful, it seemed to be more accessible to look at recent examples. As these examples were amplified, I felt that Sam began to demonstrate a sense of hope that not only could his situation

change, but that it was already beginning to. I have included a 'vignette' to further illustrate this progress.

Vignette:

Amanda If you think of getting to a 4, do you think that sounds achievable?

Sam I think that today I am probably at like a 4 or 4.5

Amanda Awesome

Sam I just feel better

Despite recognising that the hurtful comments had stopped in the last week or two, this hadn't impacted where Sam was on the scale, at least initially. He noticed a change in the way he was reacting externally to the hurtful comments but hadn't noticed a change within himself. Later in the session however, when Sam remarked that he was actually at a 4 or 4.5, this felt like a shift in him, and recognition that he was doing better already. The way that this was volunteered, without being specifically asked if he had changed where he sat on the scale, felt significant. It demonstrated to me that the scale was an effective measure for Sam and one that he continued to consider throughout our session. De Jong and Berg (2013, p. 113) explain how scaling can make "complex aspects of the client's life more concrete and accessible to both practitioner and client". The co-construction of what the scale signified, and the meaning attributed to different numbers meant Sam could express that he felt better in a way that was easy to be understood.

Epilogue:

Amanda What has it been like today talking about all of this stuff?

- Sam** It has made me think a bit. Like quite a bit.
- Amanda** Okay, what kind of stuff has it made you think?
- Sam** Just about like, if I was happier, it would make people around me happier, I guess. So, yeah.

When Sam explained that his insight from the session was that his happiness would make others happy, this emphasised that a big part of his preferred future was having those around him see that he was happy. This seemed to fit with earlier in the session when he articulated the pain he felt at recognising that his Dad had been worried about him. In recognising this discomfort, it seemed to allow Sam to realise that we wanted this to change. Shanks (2016, p. 31) researched adolescent responses to relationship questions and found that these relationships were important and that “clients were able to notice the affect relationships had on them and that they were aware of the reciprocal impact of different behaviours on these relationships”. Sam’s consideration of his relationship with his Dad is a clear example of the importance of relationship questions and the fact he could draw on a very recent exception seemed to make the desire for change more meaningful.

Reflection:

It was evident from this first session with Sam that the instances of bullying both in his past and present were having a profound effect on him and impacting on his overall wellbeing significantly. This was evident by his mood during the session and his reported lack of motivation and socialising. Given this, it is worth noting that in the first session at no stage when considering the change that he wanted, did he say he wanted the bullying to stop. I believe working in a solution focused way that focuses on the changes that an individual can make and the times when things have been better is

part of that reason. The miracle question for instance was prefaced with the miracle occurring only to Sam, allowing him to see his situation improve regardless of others behaviour, and for this change to become a possibility. Despite this presumption that Sam could improve his situation through his own action, I wish to point out that throughout the entirety of my work with him, and indeed any student who is experiencing bullying, I continued to provide information and support around the ways that help could be sought outside of the counselling room. This included, but was not limited to; offering to speak with the appropriate management in the school, with or without him present, helping make an anonymous report through the relevant channels and offering to arrange for the students causing the problems to be spoken to without his involvement being made. Despite these repeated offers, it was not what Sam wished to pursue, although I believe it did help to assure Sam that I took his situation seriously.

I do wonder if part of not expressing his desire for the bullying to stop, and for not wanting to take action against it, rested in a belief that it simply wouldn't stop. Working in a solution focused way recognised that his personal power comes in thinking about his own desires, strengths and resources rather than focusing on changing the behaviour of others. It seemed to provide a sense of hope and I wonder if it was this that allowed Sam's engagement to increase as the session progressed.

SESSION 2 – "I don't feel as bad and down".

Prologue:

The second session felt like a natural progression from the first as Sam noticed improvements in his life. His increased socialising enabled him to recognise that he had people caring about him, wanting to spend time with him and trusting him.

Crux:

I chose the following transcript because it reveals the positive changes taking place for Sam that were central to his story. The dialogue involves Sam reporting on how things have been between the sessions. While exploring this it was evident that he was getting used to the solution-focused questions and was answering them more comfortably. In many ways it felt that he was pleased to be able to report the improvements that had taken place, and I was then able to amplify these in the hope they would continue.

- Amanda** I know we used a bit of a scale last time, and you said that normally you were feeling like you were 3.5 but the particular day I saw you things were slightly better because you had a good morning and things, and a good weekend. So, you had talked about trying to maintain things at a 4.5. Where would you say things are for you at the moment?
- Sam** Um, probably between a 4 and 4.5.
- Amanda** Okay. So, do we go 4.25 do you think? (he nods) Yeah? So, 4.25 now, so that has still come up...or not when last time was 4.5, but it is not back down at that 3.5, so how have you managed to keep it quite close to that 4.5?
- Sam** Um, socialising with people instead of just staying to myself. Hanging out with my friends after school instead of just in school. Um, being able to do physical stuff, like run. I can't really run, but I can sort of, and yeah and bike.
- Amanda** Wow, that is like a whole bunch of really cool things.
- Sam** Mmm.
- Amanda** Alright, how has that been. The socialising with people instead of by yourself. How have you managed to do that?
- Sam** Um, just hanging out with people after school and then always talking to people and instead of just doing nothing I like text them and all that.
- Amanda** Um, it is sounding to me like you are being quite proactive. Would that be accurate do you think? That you are initiating quite a bit of contact with other people?
- Sam** Mhmm

Amanda Which is yeah, awesome. And how are you finding, how does it feel taking those steps, being that proactive about socialising and stuff?

Sam I don't feel as bad and down.

When Sam initially responded that he was between a 4 and 4.5, this could have been interpreted as things not getting better since the end of the last session when he was 4.5, and it was certainly something that I considered in the moment. De Jong and Berg (2013) comment on how easy it is for both a therapist and client to feel discouraged in such situations, and how important it is to recognise that life is full of highs and lows and to recognise the hidden positives. Holding onto a positive attitude with Sam, and assuming there were things that had improved, or at least that he had helped stop things getting worse, I asked how he had managed to stay close to a 4.5. This allowed us to co-construct positive changes that had occurred since last time and Sam not only told me what he had been doing, but also explained what the case had previously been. He talked of socialising “instead of just staying to myself” and of catching up with friends after school “instead of just in school”. I was struck by the ease with which Sam was able to relate the changes he had made in the absence of the problem, and then to notice the impact on how he felt. I note that this is another example of an instance where I asked about feelings as opposed to the more SFBT question of “what difference did that make?” which would likely have produced further information. With regard to my practice this highlights my inclination towards feelings questions. After exploring his current situation, I then asked about a preferred future.

Amanda Awesome. I am so pleased to hear that. Um, that is hugely impressive with all that stuff you have been able to do. So, when this 4.25 becomes a 5 what might be different?

Sam Um, I don't know.

- Amanda** What might make you notice it was a 5 as opposed to where things are currently?
- Sam** Probably just not hating myself and stuff like that.
- Amanda** Okay. So, some of that negative feeling towards yourself would start lifting. What is the impact of the stuff you have been talking about? This socialising with people, hanging and talking to people...what is the impact of that on hating yourself?
- Sam** Um, it makes me realise that people do care about me.
- Amanda** I am so pleased that you can see that. So, you are putting yourself in situations where it is maybe a bit risky, but it is actually making you realise that 'hey, these people do care about me'. In what ways do they demonstrate that?
- Sam** Um, that they like spend time with me and all that. And they talk to me and trust me with things.
- Amanda** So if you are not hating yourself is it being confident for instance? Is it being sure of yourself? I am hesitant to give you the words because maybe there is something in your mind that it looks like when you are not hating yourself? What does it look like?
- Sam** I don't know. Um, probably being more happy and stuff.

The preceding transcript shows my referencing the same scale from our first session, which allowed a way of simplifying my question and making it more accessible (De Jong and Berg, p. 113). When Sam said he wouldn't hate himself if he was slightly higher up the scale, I asked what difference that would make, and this allowed Sam to consider those that cared about him. I then encouraged Sam to frame his goal of not hating himself in a positive way, as I was concerned that the negative language would cultivate a sense of discouragement. De Jong and Berg (2013, p. 86) assert that such responses can have the effect of "focus(ing) what little energy the client may have left on trying to keep this negative something away". While we did get there in the end, I could have provided more space for Sam to speak or accepted what he initially said, rather than getting caught up with long explanations only to come back to the goal of being happy.

The session continued with exploration of what Sam's family would notice about him if he was happier and the use of relationship questions allowed him to notice "that I am probably in a good mood and not just walking around all sadly with my head facing the ground and stuff". He went on to reveal a conversation with his father just the day before in which his Dad noticed that he had "been a lot more happy lately". By co-constructing the antithesis of his self-hatred, this meant that as Sam recognised his own happiness, he was able to consider the possibility of his self-hatred diminishing. This fits within the social constructionist perspective that recognises that a problem is only such if defined by the client to be a problem. It is not an objective fact and therefore the capacity for Sam to be happier, and hate himself less, lies within his control and through a process of co-construction (refer Appendix G).

Vignette:

At this stage, when considering how things could improve, Sam brought up further hurtful comments that had been shown to him. I have chosen to exclude the details of this in order to protect Sam's identity, but have included the dialogue immediately afterwards. I felt compelled to include this vignette as it helps to provide some insight into Sam's experience and illustrates an occasion when he was almost speaking as much as me!

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Amanda | So, after everything we have talked about last time and then this happened, and you are still in a position where things are feeling like they are getting slightly better. I want to really commend you on that. Because that is showing that you have been able to process what has happened in a way that, yes you are talking about still having those feelings of hating yourself, but you haven't gone down hugely. You haven't gone back to that 3.5. Um, how come you didn't? |
| Sam | Um, it sounds probably like stupid, but whenever I always used to get sad, I used to like back at my old school when every day I was told to kill myself and all that, and |

people were verbally and physically trying to hurt me. So back then I used to, it sounds kind of weird, but I used to write down my feelings and then make them into lyrics.

Amanda I love that.

Sam So I kind of started doing that again.

Amanda When did you start doing that?

Sam Like, I started a couple of months ago, but then I stopped, and I deleted everything because I thought it was kind of stupid, but then I did it again. But I always delete them afterwards, I don't know why but yeah.

Coping questions are a common feature of SFBT and can be used to find out how a client has dealt with a difficult situation, often using reflection, complimenting and curiosity. The important aspect of such questions is that it allows a stance of accepting that things are tough for the client and to keep to their pace by not being overly “solution forced” (Hanton, 2011, p. 63). By asking a coping question that centred around how Sam had managed to not go further down the scale this week after the recent bullying, asking “how come you didn’t?”, this allowed a focus on what he was already doing that was helping. This acknowledged the further hurtful comments, but also allowed him to consider his reaction and see it as a positive. In this instance I was encouraged that Sam trusted me enough to share the coping strategy he had used, and I got the sense this took a trust in our connection and an awareness that I also cared about him.

Epilogue:

Amanda So, if we catch up next week, in the meantime, is there anything from today that you’re going to go away and think could be helpful to think about this week?

Sam Mhmm.

Amanda What is that?

Sam Just focusing on the good things, I guess.

Amanda Nice.

Sam Or, trying to.

Sam was able to articulate that he wanted to focus on the good things going on in his life and this reflected his desire to change the way he was viewing his situation and to consider that things could get better. I noticed that I didn't provide Sam the opportunity to consider how he would do this and can recognise now that it would have been helpful to explore this with him. If I had asked how he could focus on the good things it may have provided a way to clarify this goal and make it seem more attainable.

Reflection:

After the first session Sam was feeling a greater understanding of his situation and its impact on others, whereas this session it seemed he was looking towards the future more and looking at what he could do to improve the situation. He was also revealing more about himself, such as feeling hatred towards himself and writing lyrics to process his pain, that indicated a growing trust in our relationship.

SESSION 3 – “I reacted like everything was fine. But really it wasn’t”.

Prologue:

I found this session very difficult and I came away from it both concerned for Sam and the efficacy of my practice. It was surprising to me that the more I explored the session in the context of the narrative that was co-constructed across all our sessions, I began to see that it was an important part of that story, and one that I learnt a lot from. De Jong and Berg (2013, p. 176) discussed setbacks and the impact they can have on both the client and the counsellor, saying “it is easy for the practitioner to feel like nothing seems to work and for clients to wonder what use it is to try so hard”. I was able to relate to this, however they go on to explain the importance of change, even in the form of a setback, as it allows recognition of stability and as I looked more closely at this session I was able to appreciate this perspective. I begin with a piece of transcript from the beginning of the session where despite an evident low mood, I attempted to notice some possibilities in what Sam reported since the last time we met.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Amanda | So since I saw you last, what has been going on that has been better for you? |
| Sam | Um, nothing has really been better. It has just kinda stayed the same. |
| Amanda | Okay, so stayed the same. Which taking a positive perspective means it hasn't gotten worse. What has made you notice that it has stayed the same? |
| Sam | I mean, I don't really feel extremely sad, like I don't feel really sad. |
| Amanda | So you are not feeling as generally sad, what makes you notice that? |
| Sam | Um, I don't know (long pause). I'm just doing stuff that I like more. |
| Amanda | Cool, that is good to notice. What kind of stuff? |

- Sam** Like hanging round with friends, having friends over, biking around with friends.
- Amanda** If we look at the scale of how things are for you, where would you be?
- Sam** Maybe like a 4, like nothing has really happened.
- Amanda** Do you think that anyone might be noticing anything different in you at the moment?
- Sam** My parents would notice that I am not always in my room just doing nothing, and I am starting to have friends around again and go to friends' houses and not being shut up after school but actually doing stuff.
- Amanda** Okay, so that is quite a lot for them to notice isn't it!

The first question I asked of Sam this session was “what’s better?”, and is one that I tried to use at the beginning of all my subsequent sessions as it was in keeping with SFBT, recommended by Sue Young (1998), and other SFBT practitioners such as De Jong and Berg (2013). The question presupposes that in some way things have improved and encourages answers that demonstrate this, and De Jong and Berg (2013) consider the main reason for using it that it “reflects the conviction that solutions are primarily built from the perception of exceptions” (p. 148-9). When Sam indicated that nothing was better, I encouraged him to see this as a positive change. By asking him to notice what lead to his belief that things were the same, and not worse, he explained that he was “doing stuff that I like more”. This statement reflected that, despite his perception that things weren’t better, there were elements in his life that were improving. Using a relationship question, similarly, provided an opportunity for Sam to notice improvements in his situation that were otherwise not obvious. Sam immediately stated that his parents would have noticed positive changes and was then able to articulate them.

Crux:

I consider this to be the crux of our session because it includes a moment when I felt that despite his low mood, Sam was able to connect with a past memory and in doing so to express aspects of that time he clearly wanted again. This conversation came about after I asked whether things had improved in relation to not liking himself.

Amanda Do you remember a time when it wasn't like this?

Sam I guess I did the same things but just had a lot more fun doing them.

Amanda Is there something that demonstrated you were having more fun?

Sam I mean, I used to be like I don't know...I did like bad things that weren't bad. Like I was a bit cheeky and stuff.

Amanda What kind of things were they?

Sam Like just doing small things that weren't really allowed, I guess.

Amanda Would it be like pranky type things or just silly?

Sam Kinda silly. Like breaking little rules and stuff.

Amanda And, would your friends think it was kinda funny?

Sam Yeah (laughter while saying this with sense of remembering).

Amanda Can you think of any examples?

Sam Um, I remember when we used to wait at my old school, cause we weren't allowed in the back of the hall, so we would wait for a teacher to come and when the teacher was turned around we would like to run to the other side.

Amanda Oh. Haha!

Sam We would just do stuff like that, pretty small stuff that wasn't really breaking the rules.

By encouraging Sam to expand on his exception, with further questioning, we co-constructed what it was like when he was happier. The memory he had of being a little silly and breaking minor rules, allowed Sam to consider how much he would like to have that experience again. This was the only time during the entire session when it felt as if Sam's mood lightened and he clearly enjoyed remembering when he was able to be silly. It would have been easy to discourage the rule breaking or seem shocked by it, however it felt important that I respect Sam's frame of reference, and I did this by showing interest in what he talked about and asking him to clarify what he meant (De Jong and Berg, 2013). This encouraged Sam's disclosure and allowed him to recall more vividly a past success, and in highlighting it hopefully make it seem more possible. As the session continued, I attempted to elicit further detail of the exception. I began asking questions that offered the possibility of Sam being able to experience it again, however this didn't provide much response and I have noticed that I did the bulk of the talking while Sam struggled to think about how he could bring this past success into the present.

This conversation illustrates the accessibility of exceptions, and the way that recognising them can create a way forward. Rather than having to create a solution or way to bring about change this use of exception finding demonstrates the SFBT ethos of "helping change to continue rather than initiating it" (De Shazer, 1988, p. 5 as cited by Shennan, 2014, p. 77).

Epilogue:

When I was looking to finish the session, Sam revealed that he had struggled with a difficult incident during the week that he had not previously mentioned. It was the last period of the day and so extending the session was not an option, and so I adapted the way we concluded. Rather than asking what had been helpful, I sought to ensure that Sam had support and was not dealing with this alone.

I complimented Sam's resilience and inner strength and used some self-disclosure, saying "I think that is really incredible..." to let him know how impressed I was with how well he was doing (refer Appendix H). This felt like a departure from what I thought I "should" be doing; however, I have reflected that rather than being 'wrong' I was adapting and being responsive in session to client needs.

Reflection:

This session is a great example of how working in a solution-focused way can allow a way forward even when it feels like things are not going well, and when a client is not wanting to discuss the problem. I was aware that Sam didn't seem quite himself during this session which was evident not as much in his words as his tone, body language and energy levels. Yet he had said that there hadn't been any instances of bullying that week. When I realised there had been, I was initially focused on the fact that he hadn't told me and feeling like this reflected a failing on my part. What I have since appreciated is that during the session I managed to find out several positive things that were happening and elicit some exceptions that could help inform the way forward. After close analysis I found myself considering the possibility that not disclosing fitted better with an SFBT approach and allowed a difficult time to not get worse. For a young person that didn't easily self-disclose it was a safe way to sit with what had happened. Sam not wanting to talk about the hurtful comments during the week could have been an attempt to do exactly what he had said was his intention the previous week and focus on good things rather than those that were clearly causing him pain. "The lack of exploration of the problem is liberating for both the client and the therapist" (Hanton, 2011, p. 16).

SESSION 4 – “Well, I don’t really care about it anymore”.

Prologue:

This session took place after a two-week school holiday and after worrying that he may not be doing well since the last session, I was eager to know how things were and relieved to notice that Sam didn’t seem as quiet and appeared more engaged and willing to contribute without prompting. I have included a brief excerpt of dialogue from the beginning of the session which gives an indication of a change Sam has experienced.

Amanda Where would you put yourself on that scale?

Sam Well, I don’t really care about it anymore.

Amanda Wow, that’s cool.

Sam It’s kind of just there I suppose.

De Jong and Berg (2013), explain that the use of a scaling question can effectively highlight to the client any pre-session or in this instance between-session change. When Sam responded to my scaling question by way of explaining he didn’t care about the hurtful comments anymore, this indicated that he was thinking about his position on the scale in terms of the changes taking place for him. Shennan (2014, p. 148), discusses the way that a scale in of itself is not the focus but rather that it is a tool that enables a client to consider their preferred future and progress being made to get there, and remarks that the number isn’t always required. Sam did later report that he was a 5 on the scale, which affirmed that things had improved for him and allowed an exploration into how

this had occurred. Sam revealed that there was the occasional comment still being directed towards him, but he was choosing to ignore them.

Crux:

The crux of this session is when it felt like Sam was actively engaged in the process and working hard to consider how to improve his situation. It took place after first establishing that Sam would like to be happier.

- Amanda** So, if you are at a 7 out of 10 instead of a 5 and you are feeling happier, what else would you notice? You have said smiling and laughing which sounds like it happens sometimes but not all the time at the moment. What else would you notice?
- Sam** Just having more fun doing stuff.
- Amanda** Mmm. So like enjoyment?
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** So actually being able to enjoy it more, to be in that moment maybe? If you think back to when you might have been that 7 before, are there any specific things that you might have done if you were hanging out with your friends?
- Sam** No. I don't know.
- Amanda** Is there anything that your friend might notice? Do you think he notices a difference between you at home versus at school?
- Sam** Probably.
- Amanda** What would he notice?
- Sam** Probably that I'm more hyperactive and stuff at home.

After the use of a scaling question to allow exploration into a preferred future where Sam was happier, and then a relationship question to consider a friend's perspective, it became clear that Sam found it easier to have fun at home. I began exploring how this could translate to school.

- Amanda** How would it look if you were like that at school?
- Sam** I don't know - just enjoying things more (long pause). Being more motivated I guess as well.
- Amanda** When you are feeling motivated what kind of things do you want to do? Like, you know you obviously are noticing that you are not very motivated, and I know from my own experience that sometimes I can tell just from little aspects of my routine whether I'm feeling motivated. Whether I jump out of bed or write a list...but are there things you notice that you do when you are feeling more motivated?
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** What kind of things?
- Sam** Ah, for example normally I go home, and I can't be bothered to do my paper run the days that I have it, but then yesterday I had it finished by ten past 3. It normally takes me about half an hour to do it.
- Amanda** Nice. So, do you do it every day?
- Sam** Every second day.
- Amanda** Oh cool, my son is about to start a paper run so I am just learning about paper runs and I am a bit worried I might have to end up doing it! Is it kind of a thing that is a bit of a burden to have to do?
- Sam** It's just a thing that is there.
- Amanda** So you can tell you are more motivated because you just did it?
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** And when you did it you did it quicker than normal?
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** That is a really good example of being motivated isn't it, because there are things that when you don't have the motivation you just kind of do it as opposed to when you are

motivated you can challenge yourself to do it quickly. So, you got the paper run done more quickly - is there anything else you notice when you are more motivated?

Sam Probably. But I can't think right now.

Amanda That's okay, that was a great example and what I am really pleased to hear is that it was yesterday.

The ease with which Sam was able to think of an example of being motivated made me feel that this was something he had considered prior to our session, perhaps considering what he would report in session, demonstrating an increased comfort within our sessions. The fact he had been more motivated the day before seemed to fit with the way he presented in the session, with a greater sense of agency. De Jong and Berg (2013, p. 113), discuss the ability to uncover client strengths when exploring exceptions, noting "(i)f a client is able to describe what he or she did to help make an exception happen, the practitioner can readily paraphrase that description and compliment some strength of the client". Metcalf (2017, p. 50) also espouses the benefits of exception exploration to amplify client strengths, and further to this adds that it leads to a richer story.

Epilogue:

Amanda Has there been anything that you have thought about in relation to some of the stuff we have talked about. Has there been anything that you think has been useful for you?

Sam Mhmm.

Amanda What kind of things? Or thing?

Sam It's making me think about the things and then working out what I can do.

Sam's response to what was useful to him had evolved from simply thinking about things, to also considering what he could do about it. This answer seems to be a further extension from his

response at the end of the second session when he wanted to focus on the good things. This time Sam was describing a process by which he could recognise the change he wanted and work out how to improve things for himself. This felt like a shift from wanting to be happier in order to make others feel better, to wanting to be happier in order to feel happier. This change in perception is recognised as a consequence of working in a solution focused way where “as clients talk(ed) about their problems and how to solve them, their perceptions of the meaning of both problems and possible solutions shift(ed) regularly” (De Jong and Berg, 2013, p. 366).

Reflection:

During this session I found myself feeling excited and afterwards I felt a strong sense of relief and elation. I had been worrying about Sam between our sessions and wondered if he would even want to re-engage with counselling. As Sam responded during the session it seemed he was more comfortable thinking about a way forward. Hanton (2011), warns about the dangers of attributing an improvement in a client to the therapist, rather than the work of the client. I do admit that I may have had a moment of self-congratulations; however, it was clearly down to the work Sam had done over the intervening weeks and may not have linked to therapy. Regardless of why, in amplifying this success using SFBT, I am confident this helped to allow Sam to keep moving in a positive direction.

SESSION 5 – “When I did recognise it, it helped a lot”.

Prologue:

This session began with a relaxed conversation about Halloween (it was the following day), and Sam spoke of some plans he had with friends. This was the first session when problem-free talk had been natural and easy at the beginning. Sam was easily able to express what was going better for him this session, however, there was also a sense of not needing to, because he had it sorted.

Crux:

I chose this piece of transcript to illustrate the shift in Sam’s perception that came about through the co-construction of solution building conversations.

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Amanda | So if I can get you to scale how things are in terms of the comments and issues that brought you to being part of this research. How would you say things are going if you were scaling that 1 to 10 at the moment? |
| Sam | Like a 7.5, cause it is not really happening. |
| Amanda | So it doesn’t really happen. So, since I saw you last? It hasn’t happened at all? |
| Sam | Nope. |
| Amanda | Wow. Why do you think that might be? |
| Sam | Um, because I don’t give them the reaction they want. |
| Amanda | Wow, I am so pleased, because that is actually quite a long time since I last saw you. Well it's been a wee while to think that is not happening. And so, you are not giving the reaction they want. How is that impacting on you at school? |
| Sam | I mean I’m not maybe as like upset or angry, but it doesn’t really change much. |

- Amanda** So there is nothing overtly different, but you are not feeling as upset or angry.
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** Which sounds kind of a good thing. Are there any other areas that people might have noticed that you are not as upset or angry? Either at school or at home?
- Sam** Um, not that I know.
- Amanda** Can you see it going up from that 7.5? Like if it continues - do you get the sense that it is going to continue with them not...
- Sam** I mean, probably 7.5 because I get told what they say.
- Amanda** Okay so you are getting told.
- Sam** Yeah but I don't really care.

The use of scaling played a bit part in allowing both Sam and I to recognise just how far he had come. Over the course of the previous four sessions we had co-constructed a shared meaning of what the scale represented and 7.5 was a massive number in this context. Shennan (2014, p. 148) notes that “(t)here is something about a scale, and a positive number response however small, that enables talk about positive change, as the client has to justify the number given”, and in this case it wasn't small. In exploring what the 7.5 looked like Sam attributed the bullying having stopped to his own actions, when he said it was “(b)ecause I don't give them the reaction they want”. This was a clear demonstration of his increased sense of agency. When soon after this it became evident that he was still hearing the hurtful comments indirectly, he remarked “but I don't really care”, and this explained why he was able to consider them as gone. Our dialogue continued with questions that demonstrate a curiosity about how Sam was able to not react.

- Amanda** When you think about not reacting, has there been anything that has been helpful with that? Something that helps you to not react.

- Sam** I mean, just thinking about if it is true or not.
- Amanda** Can you explain that a bit more. So, being able to actually decide if what they are saying is true even?
- Sam** I just think about it, I guess.
- Amanda** And, what do you end up thinking when you think is that true or not, what do you tell yourself?
- Sam** Normally that it isn't true.
- Amanda** Awesome. Do you think when things were worse there was a part of you believing what they were saying?
- Sam** Yeah.
- Amanda** Right. So, when you believed it, their words had a power over you because you were believing a bit of it, so it was hurting, and it had this power that could attack you. Now, you are able to actually think 'is this true?' And you are able to tell yourself most of the time that it is not.
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** And, that helps you to kind of not react and not let it affect you?
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** That is so awesome. And do you think that can continue?
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** Is there anything that has helped you to get to that place where you can go 'it is not true'?
- Sam** Not really.
- Amanda** People in your life maybe, friends? Any kind of thoughts that might help you?
- Sam** Thoughts, I guess.
- Amanda** Yeah, what kind of thoughts are helpful?
- Sam** Um, I mean just thinking about if it is true or not.
- Amanda** So that is a big one.
- Sam** Mhmm.

During the preceding conversation, this exception of not reacting, was unpacked further. While I cannot be certain whether Sam recognised the importance of this exception, my questions were aimed at encouraging this recognition. This fits with the social constructionist perspective that “questions are not neutral information-gathering devices but set a co-constructive process in motion” (McGee, 1999, as cited in De Jong & Berg, 2013, p. 370). In considering if the comments were true or not, Sam was not relying on anyone else but his own thoughts and ability to determine the truth. In externalising this he was able to distance himself from the “dominant stor(y)” that had until now been shaping the way he perceived himself and lived his life (Metcalf, 2017, p. 180).

Epilogue:

Amanda So do you have any advice for me in continuing to do this kind of work that would be helpful for people in your situation?

Sam I mean it took me a while to recognise that what people were saying wasn't true, but then when I did recognise it, it helped a lot.

The ability to recognise that the hurtful comments about him weren't true seemed to be a significant change for Sam and to have made a huge change to his sense of self. In recognising that the comments weren't true Sam was able to recognise that his identity did not need to be tied to what others said or thought about him. In saying to himself that he was not who they said, this provided an opportunity to develop an alternative identity.

Reflection:

This led me to reflect on the emotional response I had in the first session when Sam told me some of the things that had been said to him in the past, and the types of things being said to him at that time. It has allowed me to recognise that my response was not about the things that were said to Sam, but that he would believe them. This difference is in some ways subtle, but when it comes to the impact of bullying it is everything.

Summary:

During our sessions I felt a gradual shift within Sam. The process of noticing instances of success in his life was at first difficult and felt forced by a series of solution-focused questions, however as the sessions progressed Sam seemed more able to identify his own agency. His demeanour went from quiet and withdrawn to starting to seem more open and confident. As he moved away from a position of victimhood to one of agency, it seemed that the power over him that those who were 'bullying' him had, was diminished. That power had extended to him hating himself as a result of the hurtful comments and while things improved for Sam, the comments never entirely stopped. Despite this, Sam was able to stop caring about what was being said, and by the final session he had come to a place where he stopped believing it. Metcalf (2017, p. 23) discusses how a 'victim' label can take over and any personal strengths are not visible to the client who is stuck in a "discourse of victimhood", that "foster(s) negative feelings of isolation and sadness". Through the course of our sessions we co-constructed a changing narrative. This re-storying process involved working out that he could be an agent of change, that he had the ability to improve his situation and that in fact he was already doing so in small ways that he could continue to build upon.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS FOR ANA

SESSION 1: “I think if they just at least would say hi to me, then it might be a bit better”.

Prologue:

It became clear that the bullying being experienced by Ana was social exclusion, and it was her friend group, that she had been a part of for years, that she was feeling bullied by in this way. At the beginning of our first session I asked Ana some questions to get to know her and find out about her interests and strengths. She described her academic, sporting and musical strengths and described herself as quiet, polite and hard working. She described a passion for ice skating, piano and baking, as well as explaining that she is independent and likes to work by herself. As we moved away from problem-free talk there was clear emotion in Ana’s voice as she fought back tears to give her responses. Throughout the remainder of the session her voice was often cracking, and at times she appeared to be waiting to regain composure before speaking.

I asked Ana to place herself on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 was the worst she could imagine the current situation being and 10 was the best. She indicated that she was currently a 3 and she indicated it had been a 1 just a couple of months previously, when her friends had planned a sleepover without her. By focusing on the shift up the scale, and how she had done this, I hoped it would spark ideas of how to keep going up the scale. At the very least I hoped it would allow her to realise that things were better now than they had been. I learnt from Ana that she had moved up the scale by trying to forget about being left out by her friends and this was further helped by knowing she could talk to her Mum when she got home each day. When it seemed that Ana was struggling to

consider things ever improving it seemed the appropriate time to move into the future and the miracle question. The initial answer that Ana gave when asked the miracle question revealed her desire to trust others more. This demonstrated an insight into her situation and a recognition that she would need to trust people more to be able to open-up and feel happier. It illustrated the wide-reaching impact of the bullying she was experiencing on all her current and potential relationships as she expressed a genuine sense of fear at the idea of trying to talk to people in her class. By asking for some elaboration on what it would look like to be trusting it became clear that it involved feeling accepted, being willing to take a risk and talk to people. This co-construction allowed greater insight for both of us and provided a goal to work towards where Ana was considering a preferred future that wasn't centred around the problem. This paradigm shift is at the heart of the miracle question and allows the possibility of creating a preferred future that is realistic (Hanton, 2011).

Crux:

I chose this piece of transcript, which followed on from the miracle question, as it included what felt like an important moment for Ana, when she simulated telling her friends how she felt. It occurred without any intention from myself and thus took me by surprise. It was a chance for her to find a voice and express what she wanted.

Amanda Right. Is there anything you think that could make you feel more comfortable in that group environment?

Ana I think if they just at least would say hi to me, then it might be a bit better. (crying)

Amanda I am wondering because you are currently at a 3, what it might look like at a 4?

- Ana** Probably a little bit more communication. Being able to just, at least they would say hi or how are you or something like that. Or answering what I say.
- Amanda** Okay. Are there times they do?
- Ana** It depends who is sitting with us. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. Yeah.
- Amanda** Are there times when you think that maybe they don't mean to be ignoring you?
- Ana** Sometimes they probably don't hear me, but quite a few times it has been quite clear that I am talking.
- Amanda** So, what could you do to encourage them to communicate more with you?
- Ana** I don't know.

At this stage of the session, while trying to look at how things could improve for Ana in her friend group, it seemed that she was requiring a change in her friends to see a change in herself. When I asked Ana to consider what things would be like if she were slightly higher up the scale, the answer involved her friends acknowledging her more. Shennan (2014, p. 111) explains the importance of ensuring the desired change seems possible by establishing a 'good enough' point and asking what it might be like, rather than asking about the process of how a client might get there. By asking about times when her friends acknowledge her, it was my hope that we could consider what she was doing differently, although rather than staying with this I then asked if they ignored her intentionally. I recognise now that perhaps I should have stayed with the original question and remained curious, rather than hypothesising, however the deviation led to Ana questioning if her friends could hear her at times. This was a glimpse of recognition that she might need to change her behaviour in some way, by speaking louder, and I wonder if this was something she had considered previously. I then got caught up doing what Shennan (2014, p. 111) advises against and asked about the process of getting there when I asked, "what could you do to encourage them to communicate with you more?". After getting a predictable answer of "I don't know", the following dialogue shows the follow up questions that had more success.

- Amanda** What would you like to tell them?
- Ana** That I feel excluded and it would be nice if you could include me more in what we do (tears).
- Amanda** What would it be like to tell them that?
- Ana** It would be hard, because I don't know if they would try or if they would just keep ignoring me.
- Amanda** What do you think they would do if you told them?
- Ana** I don't know, maybe one of them might like change, but I don't know.
- Amanda** So that is an interesting thought that maybe one of them might. What would it be like if one of them did?
- Ana** Since all 3 of them are quite close, then one of them might influence them to all change, but I don't know.
- Amanda** You said at the start when I talked about the miracle, you said you wished you could trust more, I am wondering do you think you can trust any of your friends? Do you think you could trust them enough to share this with them?
- Ana** Not really.
- Amanda** What about the girl you said was new this year. What about 1 on 1 do you think you could tell her?
- Ana** Probably.
- Amanda** Mm. What difference might that make?
- Ana** She might tell the other two or she might just start including me more.
- Amanda** Both of those things sound like quite good options don't they.

When I asked Ana what she would like to tell her friends, this question provided an opportunity for Ana to speak to her friends in a way she was unable to normally and externalise the problem. I was surprised when Ana used language that simulated speaking to her friends and believe this allowed

her to inhabit that moment and get a sense of having done it. Metcalf (2013, p. 179) explains that “externalising problems changes our relationship with the problem” and it seemed that in telling her friends what she wanted Ana was clarifying this for herself and perhaps starting to believe that she deserved better. Despite not actually telling Ana that she should tell her friends how she felt, my question carried this assumption. De Jong and Berg (2013, p. 371) highlight the intention of such questions in SFBT and the ability they have to “invite clients to construct themselves in directions consistent with the assumptions”. By continuing to ask questions from a position of curiosity and asking what difference it would make to Ana, she went from worrying that they might keep ignoring her, to starting to see positive possibilities.

Epilogue:

I have included the conversation that took place at the end of our session as the concluding portion of transcript. This dialogue illustrates my assumption that Ana had not found the session very helpful, and was my way of acknowledging this to her.

Amanda Thank you. So, in terms of the listening do you think there were times when maybe I wasn't quite getting what you were trying to tell me?

Ana Yeah

Amanda I can understand that, because maybe there were times when I....It is feeling quite hopeless for you, would that be right?

Ana Yeah

Amanda It feels like maybe there is no easy fix, and does it feel like I am trying to give you one?

Ana Yeah

Amanda What would help you move this up?

- Ana** I don't know?
- Amanda** I am wondering if you wanted more of an opportunity to talk about what has been going on?
- Ana** Yeah, it would help.
- Amanda** Because I guess I intentionally didn't go too much into that because I know you talk to mum about it as well and so I thought we'll try and focus on a positive outlook. But would you prefer if we spent a little more time dealing with what is actually going on?
- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** Would that help move these scales up a bit?
- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** That is good to know. I really appreciate that. I think you are so brave coming forward and talking to me about this.

When looking at the responses of Ana during the preceding transcript, she did not offer up much insight and answered the questions with one-word answers. I was mostly asking closed questions which didn't allow elaboration, but despite this, it felt like an important moment during the session. I was able to acknowledge that she hadn't had much space to talk about her problem, and although her answers were brief the tone was enthusiastic. I had felt up until this part of the session that we were struggling to connect, and this seemed to help.

Reflection:

In my reflections after this session I noted that it was a "somewhat frustrating session, as I found it hard to elicit hope for the future. Ana seems quite stuck in a belief that things won't change. Perhaps I need to be using more pre-suppositional language?". What I have since realised is that I was not holding onto the possibility of that hope for the future the way that I would have liked, and the fact I was seeing a need for pre-suppositional language reflects my recognition of this. I was not assuming

things would get better for Ana, most likely because I was questioning whether they could. I have since found myself thinking about my own experience at high school when I felt trapped by a friend group that was not a positive environment for me. In my own situation this resulted in moving schools and I believe this impacted my ability to consider that things could get better for Ana. I noticed myself at times during this session making judgements about Ana's situation and assuming that the solution lay in finding new friends. It became clear that while finding new friends was an option, that leaving her current friends was not. As I played this session back several times and looked through the transcript, I was surprised to find several indications that Ana was noticing things that would be helpful and considering a preferred future. I am quite confident that my use of SFBT was not what Ana had wanted or hoped for in her first ever counselling session, however, that is not to say it was not useful.

SESSION 2: "I have realised that over the week that it is just one person that is kind of ignoring me".

Prologue:

At the beginning of this session Ana talked about being at a 4 because she hadn't seen any of her friends. When asked about the rest of the week she felt that she would still be a 3, however she seemed a lot more comfortable and responsive than she had been the previous week. I took this to be a good sign that things were improving.

Crux:

The following piece of transcript signifies what I felt was the start of Ana's engagement in the solution building process.

- Amanda** So, by not interacting with them it put you up at a 4. What about that, makes it a 4?
- Ana** Um, I just think not having to think about them ignoring me, well it's mainly just one person. I have realised that over the week that it is just one person that is kind of ignoring me.
- Amanda** So you have actually come to a realisation that it is not all of them?
- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** How does that feel to consider that?
- Ana** I just feel like it is easier because it doesn't feel like the whole group is trying to ignore me.
- Amanda** Nice. So, it feels easier. Has that brought things up for you (on the scale)?
- Ana** Yeah.

In asking Ana to explain what put her at a 4, she pointed out her realisation that it was only one friend that was impacting on her. She had found an exception, being her other friends, and while nothing had changed, her recognition of this had helped her. The way she discussed it made it clear that during the week she had been noticing some positives and her disclosing this felt like an important step in our relationship, where trust was still being established. This is another example where it would have been more aligned with SFBT to ask “what difference does that make”, however to further amplify this exception, I asked how it felt for Ana, and this provided an opportunity for Ana to recognise a changing self-concept (Metcalf, 2017, p. 13). She was starting to believe she was liked by her friends and this seemed to co-construct a sense of hope that felt tangible during this session. When Ana expressed that it was feeling easier, I felt this too. “Whenever you and a client bring an exception to light, both of you become aware that some good things are happening in the client’s life, and consequently you can both feel more hopeful about the client’s future” (De Jong and Berg, 2013, p. 112). I continued our dialogue by considering a preferred future that was within reach.

- Amanda** So if we were at a 5, what might that look like? In fact, when you get to a 5, what is going to be different?
- Ana** Probably the person who is ignoring me or mad at me, would not be as mad, or would at least say 'hi', or 'how are you' or something like that.
- Amanda** Okay, what else would be happening when you are at a 5?
- Ana** Being able to walk home with them and not being told that we are meeting somewhere when actually they are meeting somewhere else.
- Amanda** So that would be a really strong indicator that things were better if you were able to walk home with them. What else?
- Ana** That's all I can think of.
- Amanda** Would you be doing anything differently at a 5?
- Ana** I would probably be happier.
- Amanda** What would you be doing if you were happier? How would your friends notice?
- Ana** I don't really think my friends would notice that, but I think I might be happier in class and willing to make more friends in class.
- Amanda** Nice. How would you do that?
- Ana** Probably sitting with people instead of sitting by myself.

I asked Ana a question about her preferred future by getting her to consider what a small step up the scale would look like. My use of pre-suppositional language, although quite clumsily delivered, reflected my assumption that things would improve for Ana. Using this language demonstrated to Ana that I believed things would get better, in the hope of creating this same assumption within her. De Jong and Berg (2013, p. 50) explain the importance of amplifying solution talk with clients who continue to return to problem talk, noting the need to notice when a client engages in solution talk and "encourage the client to provide as much detail as possible". When Ana's answer involved her friends stopping certain behaviour, such as ignoring her and making secret plans, this reflected a

problem rich solution. While it is understandable that the problem was still featuring in the solution, I wanted to encourage Ana to think about what she could be doing, and what would be happening, instead of what wouldn't (Shennan, 2014). When it seemed Ana had exhausted the possibilities of what a 5 could look like I asked what 'she' would be doing differently, rather than simply 'what is different', and this created a space where she was able to think positively and not focus on the problem. At this point she was able to consider being happier and even came up with a tangible action to take when she said, "sitting with people instead of by myself". This is an example of how working within the client's own frame can encourage new and more meaningful solutions and "replac(e) the absence of the old with the presence of the new" (Shennan, 2014. P. 56). Our dialogue continued with my effort to elicit rich description around a preferred future.

- Amanda** So that would be happening more if you were at a 5. What else might be happening, would Mum notice anything?
- Ana** I would probably just be happier at home.
- Amanda** So what might she specifically notice in you being happy at home?
- Ana** I wouldn't be mad at my sister (both laugh).
- Amanda** I can relate to having an annoying little sister, and I love the fact that you can recognise that part of you getting mad at her has to do with you not being so happy. So, you wouldn't react quite so much to her if you were happier?
- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** What would you be doing?
- Ana** Probably just ignoring her, because the reason she annoys me is just to get a reaction.
- Amanda** That's cool that you can recognise that. So, you give the reaction and she goes 'score'.
- Ana** And, annoys me more (laughter)!
- Amanda** And, annoys you more! Does that relate at all to what is happening with your friends at all?

- Ana** My Dad sometimes says, 'they are just trying to annoy you to see what you are going to do, like get mad or anything'. But I don't know.
- Amanda** Do they see a reaction from you?
- Ana** I personally don't think so, but I don't know what they consider a reaction.
- Amanda** I wonder if they have noticed anything this week, with you coming to this realisation that it is just one of the friends. I wonder if the other girls are noticing a difference in how you are relating to them?
- Ana** I don't know.
- Amanda** Has it changed the way you feel towards the other people in the group?
- Ana** Yeah, I started talking to one of them a lot more.
- Amanda** Awesome. So, she might have noticed that?
- Ana** Yeah. She has probably realised that I talk a bit more. Yeah. Yeah.

As I continued the co-construction of Ana's preferred future, I used a relationship question to allow consideration of what her family would notice. This led to what felt like a connection as we shared a laugh about sister relationships. I then shifted my questions from the future to the present and encouraged Ana to consider further exceptions during the preceding week, and how this has impacted her feeling towards her friends and their perception of her. Metcalf (2017), discusses clients who feel they have been unfairly treated by people close to them, and who hope to figure out how to change those people. She explains that while that may not be possible that "there are ways of widening the scope of the current presentation so that the client begins to notice what might be changes on his or her part to evoke a different response" (Metcalf, 2017, p. 52). In this case for Ana, it was recognising that talking more prompted a different response.

Vignette:

I felt the need to include this vignette, as it provided a valuable insight to both myself and Ana and shaped her preferred future.

Amanda So how would you get more trust in people?

Ana I think if I feel like I am getting on better with this person, I would probably feel like I am kind of able to be friends with other people.

Amanda Nice. That is a cool thing to recognise.

Ana asserted her belief that she would feel more able to make friends with other people if she could resolve the issues with the one friend that she was having troubles with. This reconciled for me what had felt like two possible options, one being sticking with her current friends and the other to pursue other friendships. It made clear to me that to do either, she needed to resolve things with her friend. Following this revelation, by way of explaining the situation to me, Ana filled me in on what was clearly a painful experience when she was not invited to a sleepover that all the rest of her friend group were invited to. This was the only time during our session that I sensed the raw hurt and pain that had been evident in our first session, and I realised that this was a significant hurdle for her to overcome. It felt like a necessary disclosure and in keeping with Metcalf (2017, p. 27), who explains, “(i)f they want to go down a problem-focused lane, we need to follow them for a while, and then inquire about how going down the lane is helpful”.

Epilogue:

Amanda Has it been helpful talking about all this stuff today?

Ana Yeah (said very quickly).

The end of the session felt very different to our first. I immediately regretted not asking this as an open question, but the way that she answered so quickly, and her enthusiastic tone seemed to emphasise her affirmative response. I went on to compliment her engagement and openness during our session (refer appendix I).

Reflection:

This second session took me by surprise. While, I had felt that Ana wasn't able to see a way forward after the first session, it was evident that things had improved significantly for her. The difference in demeanour between the two sessions was incredible and I felt a sense of connection developing. Knowing that it was difficult for Ana to trust people, I have become curious about how much that impacted on our therapeutic alliance. To be able to express what she wanted and to notice positive changes taking place required Ana to trust not only in me but in the process. After this second session it began to feel like this was possible.

SESSION 3: "The positive is knowing, just knowing.."

Prologue:

There is an expression that 'things have to get worse before they can get better', and for Ana this was the stage where it felt like things were getting worse. It was evident in her demeanour and yet unlike the first session, there was a sense of hope in the possibility of positive change.

Crux:

It is always a possibility when asking clients what is better, that they say nothing, and so I chose to include this portion of transcript as it was a moment when the use of SFBT helped me to navigate this tricky terrain.

- Amanda** So, since I saw you last Ana, what has been better for you?
- Ana** Nothing.
- Amanda** Oh no...nothing! Have a think about it. Have you noticed any areas where things have been going better?
- Ana** No.
- Amanda** Okay, so if I was to have a look at things with you in relation to how things are with your friends? If we have a look at that specific issue, and look at the scale - where would you put things at the moment?
- Ana** Probably a 1.5.
- Amanda** I am so sorry to hear that. What makes it a 1.5?
- Ana** Because last week you said I should ask my friend about her sleepover and I talked to Mum, and she said to just ask her because the worst she could say is that she didn't

want you there. So I asked her today and she just shrugged her shoulders and said I can choose who I want, and then at morning tea she brought it up again and another friend said, 'it's been like 3 months and you are still going on about it' and I was like yeah..

Amanda Okay I can see why you said you are a 1.5 because this has just happened today.

Ana Yeah.

Amanda I am really sorry. That is really tough. Can I just say to you though, that I am really proud of you for asking her, and I want to go back to what you and your Mum said about the worst that could happen. Is it the worst?

Ana It probably is around the worst. Yeah.

Amanda Okay, but it isn't worse than that?

Ana No.

Amanda So if you think about before you asked her when you didn't know what her reaction would be, is there some sense...is there any benefit in having asked her? Can you see any positive in having asked her?

Ana Um, the positive is knowing, just knowing what she was thinking.

Amanda So what is that like?

Ana It is just knowing what the friendship between us is like and that it isn't that good. Knowing that, tells me that either I should try and fix it or change friend groups. Which I don't want to do.

Amanda So it has given you a bit of clarification around the situation with that particular girl.

When Ana reported that she was a 1.5, which was close to the lowest she had been this year I decided to let her tell me about it. Rather than ask why it wasn't a 0 or 1, which would have been a more typical SFBT question. I knew Ana appreciated being able to talk about her problems and while it is not always encouraged in SFBT, there is also a place for it and a way of listening to the problem in a solution focused way that can provide a positive way forward (Hanton, 2011). After Ana explained what had happened, I was then able to establish that while this was the worst outcome she could have imagined, that in fact it wasn't worse than that. In doing this it presented the

opportunity to consider a positive perspective, which is something Shennan (2014, p. 127) encourages when he notes that “it is likely that the client will be too preoccupied with the worsening of the problem to have considered any constructive actions they had taken”. Ana had previously expressed her desire to know why her friend hadn’t invited her, and after recognising this she went on to explain how this had provided her with greater clarification about what she could do. The fact that she was considering her own actions indicated a growing sense of agency.

Vignette:

As the session continued, I could see that Ana was clearly struggling with her current situation, so I sought to find an achievable preferred future and asked about one point up the scale. Her responses reflected the problem rich space she was in during this session, as she pointed out her friend needed to change in order to feel better. I then turned to the scale and looked to find an exception in recent times and amplify this past success.

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Amanda | So at the start of the year, where were you on that scale? |
| Ana | Probably around a 7 or 8. |
| Amanda | Awesome, so that was at the start of the year. So, what was different then? (long pause) Were you doing anything differently at the start of the year? |
| Ana | No. |
| Amanda | What would they have noticed about you, like back then, what would they notice as being different to now? |
| Ana | Probably that I was talking a lot more. |
| Amanda | So back then when it was 7 or 8, and you said you could tell them stuff, so you could talk more. What else were you doing differently? |
| Ana | I probably like was happier to see my friends and stuff like that. |

In this moment, despite a tangible resistance from Ana, there was a shift from problem talk to solution talk. When I first asked Ana if she was doing anything differently back when she was at a 7 or 8, she said “no”, and there was a defensiveness about this response that I took as an indication that she did not want to consider that she should have to change, and was feeling pressure from my question (Shennan, 2014, p. 111). I have recognised that this was an instance where I could have taken a more curious stance initially. I then asked Ana what her friends would notice, and this relationship question allowed her to identify the fact she was talking more. This further reinforced and gave confidence to the idea of talking more with her friends.

Epilogue:

Amanda If you think about the 1.5 you were at the start of today. We have talked through all this stuff, where would you say you are sitting right now?

Ana Probably a 2.

Amanda That is cool. So, you have noticed a few things?

Ana Yeah.

Amanda What made it go up to a 2?

Ana Probably just talking through it.

Amanda Yeah, I am really pleased to hear that. So, I know I asked this earlier, but where do you think you might be tomorrow?

Ana Probably still at a 2.

Amanda What might get it up to a 3?

Ana I probably will go up higher throughout the week, since what happened today happened today, I will probably start to forget about it throughout the week.

Amanda Okay, where do you think you might be by the end of the week?

Ana Probably a 3.

The preceding transcript demonstrates the benefit of the co-constructed scale as a way of measuring and discussing Ana's situation. In this instance, when concluding the session, it let us both know that things had improved during the session and affirmed to me that there had indeed been a slight shift for Ana, as I had hoped. Interestingly, when asked about one step up the scale at this stage of the session it resulted in an assertion that it would probably get to that point during the week, indicating that Ana felt confident things were going to get better.

Reflection:

Even though Ana was not happy to discover that her friend had simply not wanted to invite her to the sleepover, and it affected her mood during our session, it has become clear to me that this was helpful. I don't know that I appreciated it at the time, however in the context of her story it was important for Ana to be able to confront her friend. She had spent months wondering and worrying about why she wasn't invited to the sleepover, and although what she discovered was upsetting, it was at least an answer. She was finally able to accept what had happened and move on. I don't know if this session helped at all with moving on, as Ana was still processing what had happened, however it may have allowed a space for her to do so when she was ready.

SESSION 4: "The main thing is that I am happier. Yeah."

Prologue:

At the beginning of this session when I asked Ana what was better, she informed me that since the last session, and with advice from her Mum, she had decided to invite all her friends (including the one that she felt was intentionally excluding her) to her birthday party. She told me that they were all being more friendly towards her, and that it felt as if they were all forgetting about what had happened when she wasn't invited to the sleepover. The change in Ana's demeanour was very evident as she seemed excited and chatty. We started to discuss the specifics of the party in a relaxed and casual way.

Crux:

This piece of transcript seemed to best represent the improvements taking place for Ana and the way these were co-constructed through our conversation.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Amanda | Where would you put yourself on the scale? |
| Ana | Probably around a 7.5. |
| Amanda | Nice. That is very cool. So, what makes it a 7.5? What has changed? |
| Ana | The relationship between my friends has got better and I have been talking more. |
| Amanda | Great. What else? |
| Ana | I think since I made sure they are all included and invited all of them, and I made sure no one is left out and made sure none of them felt how I feel or felt. |

- Amanda** Yeah, and I love the way you are able to know what it feels like to be left out, so as much as it is sometimes hard to take that higher road, you also didn't want someone else to feel the way you felt and you can understand it. So, you are being inclusive of everyone, and it sounds like by you including them they have started to be more inclusive of you.
- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** Have you noticed anything else that has been different at this 7.5?
- Ana** Not really. I just think that they include me more that is probably the main thing I have noticed.
- Amanda** What do they do when they see you?
- Ana** They either say hi or they wave.
- Amanda** Nice, and what do you do?
- Ana** I just say hi back or wave.
- Amanda** Nice. So, there is an element of them doing more initiating and stuff. Do you think you are also initiating some of that contact?
- Ana** A little bit.
- Amanda** Mmm. That is awesome to hear. What might mum and dad be noticing at home that is different at the moment?
- Ana** The main thing is that I am happier. Yeah.
- Amanda** How does that look at home? How would they know?
- Ana** I am not fighting as much with my sister.
- Amanda** Ah!
- Ana** Yeah. (both laugh)
- Amanda** Cool, so you are getting along better with your sister. What else might they notice?
- Ana** That I am probably doing my after-school activities, because last term I was like skipping activities and stuff.
- Amanda** Mmm. That is awesome. So that is a lot of really positive stuff that is going on and having the party to look forward to must be really nice too.

After hearing that Ana was at a 7.5, which signified a huge shift up from the previous session, I asked several questions to allow her to elaborate on the exceptions. This allowed her to recognise the significance of the exceptions and her role in bringing them about (de Jong & Berg, 2013). The use of affirmations and compliments, such as 'that is awesome', or 'nice' also helped to reinforce this success.

When I asked what her friends do when they see her, this provided Ana the opportunity to report that they were acknowledging her in the way that she had wished for in the first session. The impact of this 7.5 on Ana's general demeanour was evident when she was able to light-heartedly talk about her relationship with her sister and we shared a laugh. The impact this had on our therapeutic alliance made me consider the similar impact on the relationship with her friends. Metcalf (2013) reported that a clients' demeanour would often change considerably simply by asking them to consider how they come across to others and allowing them to notice that this might evoke a different response.

Epilogue:

At the end of our session I took the opportunity to reinforce the progress that had been made and to invite Ana to consider where she thought things were going (refer appendix J). Hearing Ana saying that she hoped to be at a 9, and that there was an 80% chance this would happen, highlighted to us both how far she had come. I pointed out that it was unlikely during our first session that she would have sought out a 9, and this created a nice moment of shared humour, that was underlying a realisation of the change that had taken place.

Reflection:

I will admit that I felt a sense of relief after this session, having wondered if I was going to be helpful to Ana at times during our previous sessions. It was suddenly very clear that she was seeing benefit in our sessions, not just in the way she presented. As she was leaving at the end of this session, I mistakenly remarked that it was our fifth session, and she was very quick to say it was only the fourth and that she would still have two more.

SESSION 5: "I just felt like I was like part of the group".

Prologue:

The session began with a really nice conversation about the birthday party where Ana reported that it was a lot of fun and better than expected.

Amanda So since I saw you last week, what has been better?

Ana Um, well since it was coming up to my party I felt like they were talking to me more and being more friendly.

Amanda So that was lovely, what else has been better?

Ana I just felt like I was like part of the group and not just there, but like part of it.

Amanda Kind of like you are participating in the group as opposed to...

Ana Just being there.

It was incredibly heartening to hear Ana describe feeling a part of the group, and when she finished my sentence this felt like an indication of an increased level of comfort that Ana felt in the therapeutic relationship we had established.

Crux:

The following dialogue takes place after Ana reported that she was a 6.5, which was a point lower than the previous week. I chose this as the crux because it demonstrates my effort to focus on the fact that this was still significantly higher than the first session and encourage talk of what was better.

Amanda Have you noticed times when things have been better since I last saw you?

Ana I feel like when we were, on Saturday, I feel like they were like talking to me and enjoying having conversation with me and I felt like that was better than normal.

Amanda Nice. So, you felt they enjoyed talking with you. That is so nice to notice. Is there anything you think that could help to maintain that?

Ana I don't know, because I knew they were including me more throughout the last week because of the birthday party. And then I didn't get mad at them, because then they would get mad at me, so the whole week I was trying not to. But I haven't been as bad as I was last year.

Amanda So because you had the party, you made a real effort not to get mad at them.

Ana Yeah.

Amanda How did you do that?

Ana I would just, if they were saying something that would annoy me, I would just listen and not say anything back.

Amanda So you just listened and didn't say anything back?

Ana Yeah.

Amanda That is not easy, and actually something I am still working on (laughter)! So, I am curious as to how you do that? How do you just listen?

Ana I just, I normally sit on my hands. (laugh)

This was the first time Ana was able to admit that sometimes she behaved in a way that was problematic, such as getting 'mad'. Her acknowledging it demonstrated a willingness to be vulnerable and indicated a growing sense of trust in our relationship. In recognising that it was not simply her friends, but that she too was making an effort prior to her party, meant it was then possible to co-construct a way forward that was in her control. The preceding transcript demonstrates Ana's increased ability to work in a solution-focused way and what felt like a shift in perception.

I was able to explore the exception of Ana not getting mad and find out how she did this by coming from a position of curiosity and not knowing, relying on Ana's frame of reference and encouraging her to tell me more (de Jong and Berg, p. 20). After Ana explained how she sits on her hands in order to not get mad I went on to ask how that helps and she told me that it helps her remember it is not worth reacting. Even though Ana was explaining what she was already doing, in getting this detail it provided an opportunity for Ana to "clarify and amplify (her) goals, strengths, and successes" (De Jong and Berg, 2013, p. 26). It felt like she was telling herself this as much as me and, in that way, co-constructing a goal and a pathway towards it.

Epilogue:

- Amanda** Okay. With everything we have talked about today, does it give you some ideas of anything you might like to do moving forward?
- Ana** I might ask one of them if they are free in the weekend or something.
- Amanda** Cool. That sounds like a really cool idea. It has been cool to hear about your party and I would like you to keep noticing the good stuff that is happening. Because you were really worried last week when you said it was good but thought it wouldn't be next week...(laugh) but we are in next week, and while it might not be as high as it was but it isn't terrible is it?
- Ana** No.
- Amanda** How awesome that it hasn't gone way down.
- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** And that it is sitting at a 6.5. You have done a lot of work to try and improve your situation and I can really see that things are going to keep getting better. Do you feel hopeful about that?
- Ana** Yeah, I do.

By asking Ana what she might do after our session, this allowed her to present her own idea of asking a friend to hang out in the weekend, which I then complimented as a good idea. I had an opportunity to clarify this intention further in the hope of making it more likely, however I think my focus at the time was on the progress Ana had made and I neglected to do this. I managed to notice how much better things were than had been expected and acknowledge Ana's involvement in improving her situation.

Reflection:

I did worry for Ana that her friends might do what she had predicted and that after the party they would begin ignoring her again. I was delighted for Ana that this wasn't the case and it allowed Ana to consider that her friends may wish to be her friend regardless of the likelihood of a birthday invite.

SESSION 6: "Sometimes I get like cut off, but most of the time I don't".

This final session was much shorter than all the others and a lot of the session was taken up with problem-free talk. It was clear that Ana had come to a place where she did not need further counselling and I felt privileged to get this final opportunity to see the progress she had made.

Crux:

This piece of transcript shows further examples of a shift in perception and the belief that things are getting and will get better.

Amanda Since we last caught up, have you notice anything has been better for you Ana?

Ana Not really. It has been about the same.

Amanda So you have noticed things staying the same?

Ana Yeah.

Amanda Well, that is really cool. Cause I remember you worrying it might after the party get worse.

- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** So how have you noticed things staying the same?
- Ana** Well I haven't really noticed any like back turning or anything like that.
- Amanda** That is fantastic. What else?
- Ana** Um, they are talking about stuff or doing stuff that I am a part of. Sometimes, if they talk about things I don't do, it is hard to contribute to the conversation. But when it is things I am involved in, it is easier.

When Ana reported that things had stayed the same it would have been possible to see this as things not improving, however by reminding Ana that she had believed things would get worse, this provided an opportunity to recognise that things were in fact better than expected. According to De Jong and Berg (2013, p. 177), it is possible for a client to feel embarrassed about nothing being better, however by allowing an opportunity to see the "flip side" of the coin (that things were better than had been predicted), the potential setback can be viewed as a success.

Our dialogue continued with a scaling question.

- Amanda** Where would you say things are for you on the scale in relation to the issue that brought you to doing this research?
- Ana** Probably around a 7. I would like to be higher, but don't think it can be at the moment, seeing as there is still a little bit of exclusion.
- Amanda** Okay. Do you think there is anything you could do that could help to get it higher?
- Ana** I just try and be involved in quite a lot of conversations just to see what happens.
- Amanda** And generally how does that go?
- Ana** Sometimes I get like cut off, but most of the time I don't.

Ana placed herself at a 7 on the scale which is above the 6.5 from the previous week. Given that she had initially reported that things were the same, this seemed to indicate that her sense of where

things were for her had changed during this early part of the session. I also noted that Ana was starting to express things from an optimistic stance, with an assumption that things could improve. When she said “I would like to be higher” in reference to the 7, this demonstrated that she believed that things could be higher. Likewise, optimism was expressed when I asked her about her involvement in conversations. While she reported getting cut off at times, this was followed immediately with “but most of the time I don’t”. This stood out to me as a noticeable change in Ana’s outlook and indicated that she was seeking to notice the positive and not focus on the negative.

Epilogue:

- Amanda** Has there been anything that you think has been helpful from our time together or things that you think could be more helpful?
- Ana** I think talking it through helped quite a lot. I think that is probably the main thing that helped.
- Amanda** Is there anything about talking it through that has been helpful?
- Ana** It is just like pretty much just telling someone that helps. Even though I do tell Mum and Dad, it is just that telling someone besides them helps, because then someone else understands, kind of.
- Amanda** And I noticed, that because you hadn’t talked about it with anyone except Mum and your family. But the more you have done it; I have felt that you have become more comfortable.
- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** Do you have any thoughts or ideas about how you have related to people or your friends? Anything that has been helpful from what we have talked about?
- Ana** I can’t really tell, just talking it through and thinking of ways to make it better and things like that.
- Amanda** So that has been helpful, to think of ways to make it better?

- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** Has it changed the way you have viewed anything, in terms of your friendships?
- Ana** It has probably made me feel more confident initiating conversations or being involved, yeah.
- Amanda** Nice. That is really nice to hear. I mean I personally think your friends are incredibly lucky to have you as a friend. I have really enjoyed our conversations and getting to know you a little bit. And it is so clear from everything you have told me what a caring person you are and how much you feel things and not just for yourself but for others. Your consideration of what others feel. I always think that being like that can be a gift and a curse at the same time.
- Ana** Yeah
- Amanda** So you feel things really deeply, and what others might find easier to brush off, is really hard. But I can see you trying to not let those things that hurt, you are trying to allow yourself to move past it for the sake of your friendships.
- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** Which is a pretty awesome thing to be able to do. And continuing to include people that have hurt you and being able to see that maybe they didn't intend to hurt you in the way that happened.
- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** Well, that is really cool, and I appreciate all of that feedback because it is really helpful for me. I am really pleased that things have gotten better over the course of us catching up.

I can honestly say that at the beginning of our time together, I would have never thought we would get to where we ended. Ana was able to express that talking things through was helpful because it allowed her to feel understood and increased her confidence when initiating or involved in conversations. I noticed that I never asked "what else" when Ana was answering these questions and I wonder if perhaps I would have found out more had I done so. While noticing what helped was great information for me, it also served the purpose of amplifying to Ana what she had learnt.

Reflection:

When Ana discussed the importance of feeling understood I found myself questioning how well I had managed to do this. De Jong and Berg (2013, p. 40) when discussing relationship building, and the importance to a client of having their perceptions affirmed, explain that clients “need some indication that practitioners can understand how they think, feel, act or experience life”. In Ana’s case I think this related to her desire to stay close to her friends that were making her feel so bad about herself. I know that some of my questions in early sessions implied that she may be better off without them and perhaps this led to some resistance from Ana initially. Once I was able to recognise that Ana’s perception was that she would be happier with these friends, I stopped questioning an alternative future, and this may have been when I built the necessary trust that allowed her to feel accepted.

Summary:

Working with Ana was an enlightening experience for me into the genuine struggle of those affected by social exclusion bullying, as expressed by Allen (2014, p. 122):

“Being socially targeted or neglected served as a form of oppression. As long as the setting incurred a sense of powerlessness and the protagonist did not have agency, her narrative identity was vulnerable to lowered self-esteem and self-blame.”

Unlike in situations such as Sam’s, where reporting the bullying is at least an option, for those feeling bullied by friends with whom they wish to remain friends, reporting isn’t really an option. It is also less likely to be responded to when occurring amongst friends, even when reported (Mishna, 2004). I was able to see the far-reaching impact on her whole life of feeling bullied by her friends and how

devastating that felt, and how isolating when she was unable to confide in her friends. The proximity of this form of bullying and the fact that the 'bully' knows the victim seems to add power and impact to the bullying and make it almost impossible to distance oneself from the bullying. For Ana, she was facing the possibility of having no friends at all. This created a huge sense of insecurity within her that made reaching out to new friends almost impossible.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

Introduction:

In undertaking this research, it was my intention to consider how working in a solution focused way influenced students experiencing bullying. In the previous two chapters by presenting the findings with reference to the various SFBT skills that were used I have attempted to demonstrate the way SFBT has influenced the emerging narrative. What follows is my attempt to bring together some of what was revealed to me in the findings, in the context of current literature, and consider what this has contributed to my understanding in this area.

I have identified three main areas that I will focus on, with reference to relevant literature, in order to clarify what emerged from my findings. Firstly, I consider the client ratings on their co-constructed preferred future scale, and how these findings compare to previous literature. Next, I examine the shift in client perceptions that emerged in the findings, relating this to literature. Finally, I look at how the participants viewed themselves and any noticeable change away from victimhood.

Following this I will consider the implications for me personally, for my practice and for other school counsellors or SFBT practitioners. Lastly, I will look at the limitations of this study and suggest possible next steps for research in this area.

Subjective measures:

I begin with consideration of the subjective measures I used through the course of the therapy. There were various scales that I used throughout the sessions with both clients, but one in particular related to the reason they had presented for counselling and was connected to the bullying. It provided a means by which improvement could be identified, whether in an exception or a preferred future and as can be seen in the findings demonstrated improvement throughout the therapeutic process. As discussed in the findings, this co-constructed scale allowed a shared understanding of how the participant was feeling regarding the bullying they were experiencing. When things seemed worse, which happened for both participants at one stage, the scale reflected this setback. The subjective measures from my findings are supported in SFBT literature, such as Young and Holdorf (2003), who used a similar scale to determine if the SFBT intervention was successful and considered movement up the scale to indicate this success. This approach to measuring outcomes was not new and is consistent with other studies of SFBT, where the progress was measured using the judgement of the client, and among other things using the client's scaling (De Jong and Berg, 2013). In a study of treatment outcomes, De Jong and Hopwood (as cited by De Jong & Berg, 2013, p. 245) measured what they termed an "intermediate outcome", where they compared a client's scaling at the first and final session in order to identify progress. They considered between a 4 and 8 point positive difference to show significant progress and found 25% of the cases in their study to be in this category. Both Sam and Ana had a difference of 4, with Sam moving from a 3.5 in the first session to a 7.5 in the final session, while Ana began at a 3 and in the final session reported being a 7. My research affirms the progress that was reported in larger studies and thus adds support to the research on the positive influence of SFBT for those who experience bullying.

Shifting client perceptions. “Believing is seeing” (De Jong & Berg, 2013, p. 376)

When examining my findings with regard to my research question, I noted a shift in client perceptions as our sessions progressed. This shift coincided with increased engagement in the process and an understanding that they could initiate change. SFBT privileges the perception of the client, inviting them to be the expert and consider their own and others’ perceptions, in order to create change. In allowing the participants to explore exactly what they wanted, without questioning their perspective, this created the conditions that allowed them to consider change. De Jong & Berg (2013, p. 376) explain that solutions lie in the ability of a practitioner to explore what it is a client really wants and how to make it happen, and that unlike in other more diagnostic models, through the use of SFBT it is possible “to co-construct the expanded perceptions and definitions they need to live more satisfying and productive lives”. Exploring exceptions and considering preferred futures provides the basis with which change can be explored and client perceptions changed.

As the therapeutic experience was co-constructed, both participants made meaning of their experience and perceived their place in it. Initially the problem seemed to be outside of their control, and dependent on the behaviour of others, but my findings indicated a shift in both participants, as their understanding of what exactly they wanted to be better, and how it could be achieved, developed.

De Jong and Berg (2013) discuss the way that SFBT allows client perceptions to shift during the course of therapy, in relation to both the way they perceive both the problem and solution. They discuss how what can start out as uncertainty around what exactly the problem is and how best to address it, can become clearer, and that this often occurs as clients come to realise their part in the process (De Jong & Berg, 2013, p. 367). The idea that my participants were not clear about the

problem could initially seem absurd, given they presented specifically because of bullying. Aspects of the problem however, still needed exploration, and the solution was unclear to begin with. Increased clarity seemed to come from identifying things that they could influence that were likely to improve their situation, such as Ana noticing that she could initiate conversations more with her friends. Metcalf (2013, p. 52) discusses how common it is to find that a client believes others must change in order for them to be happy, saying:

“Unfortunately, there are no ideas for directly changing people. However, there are ways of widening the scope of the current presentation so that the client begins to notice what might be changes on his or her part to evoke a different response from someone else”.

I feel the need to clarify, that expecting a client to make changes is not in any way suggesting that it is their fault they are experiencing bullying. The idea of change relates to their agency and belief that things can improve and having some ability to enable that change. Young (1998, p. 37) discusses a key tenet of SFBT being the ability to work independently, and even not know what the problem is, saying “the solution has nothing to do with the problem”.

When working with Sam, one of the most notable shifts in perspective came during the first session when he realised the bullying had not only impacted him, but also his Dad. Initially this was distressing for Sam, and he was clearly surprised by his realisation. By the end of the session however, Sam expressed, “if I was happier, it would make people around me happier, I guess”. In subsequent sessions there was further evidence of a changing perspective and the more Sam

considered his part in both the problem and the solution, the more his perception of what that problem and solution were, changed. In the fourth session he started to see himself as an agent of change and consider different things that could help, such as working out what he could do, indicating that he could in fact do things to improve his situation. This supports the findings from Rhodes and Ajmal (1995, p. 54) who referenced a student called Brian who had shown increasing confidence as sessions progressed, asserting “people can help you but you have got to help yourself”. Sam also seemed to have shifted his perception around the amount of energy he was putting into the bullying when he commented “I don’t really care about it anymore”. This was a clear indication that he could choose how much he let it bother him. What had inflicted the most damage was not the hurtful comments themselves, but the fact that Sam had believed them, and in recognising this, Sam was able to build a solution that aligned with his new perception.

For Ana, there was significant resistance to considering her part in the problem. Her initial focus was on what was being done to her and how it made her feel, and she didn’t seem willing to consider making any changes herself, placing her happiness in the hands of others and demonstrating a considerable lack of agency. The problem as she saw it was that her friends were being unkind and excluding her, and the solution involved them changing or her finding new friends. As our sessions progressed the perceived problem became more defined and it was evident that it wasn’t all her friends but only one. As we unpacked her preferred future and exceptions it became clear that Ana had been hurt significantly by one specific incident of social exclusion, and a big part of the solution became accepting that and moving on from it. Ana started to demonstrate a greater sense of agency and was starting to see her “part in the process” (De Jong & Berg, 2013, p. 367). This was particularly evident in the fourth session when she said “(t)he relationship between my friends has got better and I have been talking more”. This acknowledgement that her talking more was relevant to her situation was a clear shift in perception.

Sam had believed the hurtful comments being directed at him, and Ana had believed that her friends didn't care about her. In both cases they moved away from believing a negative self-concept in order to see other possibilities. My research contributes specific case examples that allow for greater understanding, particularly for practitioners, of how this change in perception looks.

Co-constructing away from victimhood:

Having explored the way both participants were able to move towards a changing perception of their situation, I now look at the perception they had of themselves. Focusing on the way that SFBT allowed the participants to recognise their strengths and social supports and how this enabled a move away from victimhood, I consider the findings and relevant literature.

The support group approach was what sparked my interest in working with victims of bullying, and after analysing my findings, it occurred to me that there was a similar sense of support to be found in individual SFBT therapy. I became curious about the way this support was achieved and whether it served a similar function to that of the support group approach. Kvarme et al., (2015) and Young (1998) espouse the efficacy of the support group approach and support the idea that a significant factor in moving away from victimhood, is feeling supported and understood. Because of the different forms of bullying Sam and Ana experienced, they found this support and understanding in different places. For Ana, the therapeutic relationship which slowly developed and the belief that I understood her situation seemed to provide a sense of support that allowed her to more confidently engage with her current friend group. Relationship questions were fundamental when working with

Sam and allowed him to recognise the support that came from his family and friends. In both cases this sense of support and understanding seems to have been a significant factor in finding agency.

There is a prevailing attitude in New Zealand that a victim can encourage bullying and that “the incitement and persistence of bullying is due to a fundamental weakness or failing of the victim” (Balanovic et al., 2016, p. 50). I do not wish to perpetuate this belief in any way and hope that what is presented, through the use of SFBT, demonstrates a movement away from victimhood that still honours the victim’s experience and encourages positive and self-affirming change.

Research looking at the bully/victim paradigm in Australia (Cranham & Carroll, 2003, p. 129) suggests that bullies are incredibly resistant to self-change while “victims of bullying recognise the need for self-change”, although, don’t necessarily believe it will help their situation due to “their low self-concepts”. My findings support this and further demonstrate the possibilities for working with victims using SFBT that encourages empowerment by seeing them as the expert with strengths and resources.

Literature supporting the use of SFBT for situations of bullying, highlights the connection between improved self-identity and moving away from victimhood. Social support is seen as both a protective factor against bullying and a way to move away from victimhood (Kvarme, et al., 2015). The ability to amplify existing relationships, whether with friends or family, and consider change in interactional terms is a key tenet of SFBT through the use of relationship questions (De Jong & Berg, 2013). De Jong and Berg (2013, p. 369), explain the importance of relationship questions in allowing recognition and exploration of different perspectives and describe how clients are able to “reshape meanings under the influence of the communities in which they live”.

Throughout the course of our sessions I felt that both Sam and Ana moved from a place of victimhood to one of increased agency. That is not to say that all their problems relating to bullying were solved, however it meant that they had recognised some strengths and resources that they could draw upon when confronted with bullying. Metcalf (2013, p. 13) discusses the importance of changing the negative label clients have “that undermines any possibility of progress”. By choosing to avoid using the terms ‘victim’ and ‘bully’, I believe this further helped minimise the sense of victimhood and meant bullying was no longer impacting the participants in such a significant way.

Sam revealed, during the second session, that the thing he would notice if he was slightly higher up the scale was “just not hating myself and stuff like that”, letting me know that the bullying had impacted him significantly. For Sam, it had led to withdrawing himself socially and feeling very unhappy, yet when asked how socialising impacted his feelings toward himself, he said “it makes me realise that people do care about me”. Amplifying the positive relationships that Sam already had in his life was an important part, I believe, in acknowledging what Sam had to offer and starting to move away from victimhood. Throughout the sessions Sam reported instances where friends supported and listened to him, stood up for him to the bully and defended him. This social support can play an important role in diminishing the impact of bullying (Mishna, 2004, p. 242). Each time we met, Sam reported increasing social interactions. It seems likely that through the use of relationship questions he began to consider the opinions of his friends as more meaningful than that of the bully, and eventually came to a place where his opinion of what the bully was saying had the ability to lessen the impact of it.

For Ana, the social exclusion that she was experiencing was confirming a negative self-identity she held of herself. Initially she believed that none of her friends wanted to listen to her or spend time with her and admitting this in the first session was clearly a painful experience. It is possible Ana felt responsible for her victimisation, and it is common for the victim of bullying to be blamed and feel it is their fault, particularly females (Mishna, 2004, p. 238). When Ana confronted the friend she felt bullied by, the reaction from her friends reinforced this blaming when Ana said “at morning tea she brought it up again and another friend said, ‘it’s been like 3 months and you are still going on about it’ and I was like yeah”. Given her friends attitude, which indicated she should just move on, it was important that Ana could feel heard in our sessions and receive the empathy that was evidently lacking from her friends. It seems likely that her friends did not consider their behaviour to be a form of bullying, which would fit with literature suggesting young people “were more reticent to judge behaviour as bullying when it occurred among friends” (Mishna, 2004, p. 243).

As occurred with Sam, Ana began to socialise more as our sessions progressed and in doing so was less able to believe the negative discourse that her friends didn’t want to spend time with her. By the end of the sessions I felt that Ana had an improved sense of self and was consequently better able to include herself with her peers.

Implications for practice:

Given that this research was practice-based, I wish to include the implications it has had for my own counselling practice before considering those for other school counsellors and SFBT practitioners.

Implications for my practice:

In choosing to conduct practice-based research, it was my hope that it would help me develop my confidence and skills as an SFBT practitioner. I can report that the process has indeed had this impact.

I have found myself instinctively using solution-focused language in a way that was not as evident prior to this study. The most notable question that has become firmly embedded in every subsequent session with my clients is “what’s better?” This allows a positive and focused start to sessions and when done consistently encourages clients to come to sessions with this in mind.

I have learnt that in the moments when it feels perhaps my approach is not working, that this does not mean I should abandon SFBT questions. Previously I have found myself convinced that SFBT must not work for certain clients, when it felt tricky, and subsequently moved away from it. There were times during my sessions with both Sam and Ana that, had it not been for the research, I might have done the same. Hanton (2011, p. 103), discusses learning from a client the importance of trusting in the model and the need “to be skilful in asking the right questions and humble enough to accept when we get it wrong and try a different question”. From this experience I learnt the benefit of sticking with the SFBT questions, even when I felt like I was fumbling to find the right ones at times. The process of conducting this research has resulted in a desire to continue to learn from and analyse the work with my clients. Having become aware that this can uncover new knowing, I find myself seeking to analyse my sessions more thoroughly in general.

Implications for school counsellors and SFBT practitioners:

An implication of this research for those working with young people who have been the victim of bullying, is that they can feel encouraged to use SFBT. I do note however that given the small sample size, this is said hesitantly, and in recognition that another practitioner will engage differently with the therapy and client.

For those working in a school setting, my findings suggest that they may not need to define the type of bullying. Sam and Ana had experienced very different forms of 'bullying'. In the school setting these two cases would be dealt with entirely differently if they were brought to the attention of school management. In Sam's case there is a very high chance that those responsible for 'bullying' him would receive some form of punishment and parents would likely be informed. In Ana's case it would likely not be taken very seriously by the school. Yet, despite the huge variance in the way a school would deal with these cases, in using the same approach in counselling, both "victims" came to a place where things were improving. Both developed an awareness of what they could do to minimise or stop the bullying. Both were affirmed that what they had experienced was not fair or acceptable and knew what they could do to report it. I am not suggesting that an implication of my research is that counselling for victims of bullying would be any kind of alternative for working to stop a "bully", and I believe it is important when an instance of 'bullying' is reported to take it seriously and to take action on behalf of the victim to protect them.

A further implication for those working as school counsellors is the idea that seeking out victims of bullying to engage in counselling or to share their story could have a positive impact. Mishna (2004,

p. 243), when conducting research into differing perspectives around bullying noted “(a)n unanticipated effect of the research interview was the shift made by some respondents in their perspectives. Thus, the research process offered evidence of the ability of individuals to change their attitudes through reflection”. My participants came to counselling because of recruitment, and it is likely they would have otherwise not done so. This suggests that perhaps there is something stopping some young people presenting for counselling and that encouragement could prove effective. Mishna’s consideration that “(i)f children are not listened to and validated, they may doubt their own feelings and views and may stop telling adults about their victimization”, affirms the importance of providing an opportunity for students to come forward when feeling bullied, or if still impacted by historic instances. I also had students present for the research that were not eligible due to the bullying not being current, however they were still impacted and had a strong desire to share their story. In the counselling space there is an opportunity for a victim of bullying to talk about their experience without fear of further repercussions to begin with. Given the small size of my study I can draw no definitive conclusions about this and simply suggest this as something worth considering, based on this study, and encourage further research into this possibility.

Finally, for those working as school counsellors or SFBT practitioners, I encourage you to embrace rather than be fearful of work and research around bullying. Choosing to focus my research around the issue of bullying has been daunting at times and I often found myself asking why I didn’t choose an aspect of SFBT to look at rather than a massive social issue. It is a topic that most people have strong opinions about and there were times I found myself feeling very defensive about what I was undertaking. Questions ranged from why wasn’t I focusing on how to stop the bully? How have I defined and was it in fact bullying? While I did feel a sense of pressure in taking on such a broad and socially relevant issue, I also enjoyed the frequent opportunities for discussion and learning and

appreciated the instances of hearing my peer's experiences of bullying. Ultimately, I have relished the opportunity to form part of an evolving conversation but have become immensely aware of what a sensitive topic it is and hope that for that reason it doesn't put others off undertaking research or working in this area.

Ultimately students who are experiencing bullying are likely to be students who are unhappy. In offering such students counselling if they wish to engage in it, I can see no harm. Surely it is better than them seeking no help. By having punitive measures in place for bullies it may look like a school is 'doing something', however I fear it may be further alienating the victims and making it harder for them to get help.

Research Strengths and Limitations:

One of the most significant limitations was the lack of a reflective voice from the participant. While I reflected about the emerging narrative from our sessions, I didn't provide an opportunity to add the participants' voices in relation to their experience of our sessions. There was some opportunity for client reflection at the end of most sessions, and the insight this provided has led me to believe further data collection relating to the client's reflective voice would have strengthened the study, and could have been achieved through a client interview at the conclusion of counselling. Despite not having this data, I included significant client transcript and analysis to ensure ample client voice.

Having significant client voice, both in the way data was collected and presented is a strength that allowed for a greater understanding of this research at an individual level. A further strength was that the research was practice-based, allowing a realistic representation of counselling sessions. This is particularly helpful given the most likely people to engage with the research are practitioners.

I believe despite the limitations this research provided sufficient rigour and ensured a robust presentation of my findings to support the question I sought to answer.

Any suggested outcomes are not generalisable and without a comparative analysis or a control it cannot be established the outcome is due to SFBT, or simply the act of engaging with counselling of any sort. There is also no way of knowing if there was a lasting improvement, without a follow up at a later date.

Future research:

This research presents two participants' experiences and is therefore limited in terms of the broader context it provides. Larger studies would add further context as would more similar studies that can be considered in relation to each other.

Practice-based research that includes the counselling session data and is followed up with semi-structured interviews would provide further client voice and insight.

Similar case study research working with the 'bully' could be an interesting addition to the literature. I wonder if our labelling of the 'bully' is counter-productive and whether, similar to working with a victim in a solution focused way, it could be beneficial to work with the 'bully' to allow them to move away from what could be a negative self-presentation that they are feeling in some way powerless to change.

I would be interested to see research that looked at the impact of being a participant in studies, specifically for victims of bullying, and the possible connection to a sense of empowerment and/or feeling they can help others through their story.

Conclusion:

As I conclude my research, I have mixed feelings. Much like when I near the end of a good book; on the one hand I have a sense of excitement, to be nearly done and know all there is to know about the story. Having explored the influence of SFBT when working with students who are experiencing bullying, I have learnt about the importance of how the problem is perceived, how measuring progress can help and the way that a sense of support and understanding can enable increased agency. Much like with a long novel, I have a sense of achievement for completing it. On the other hand, I am anxious that it is nearly over and wonder what I will be left not knowing, already grieving the loss of the characters, and uncertain what will fill the void that is left behind. I am left wondering if a support group approach could prove more effective, and if the participants improvements have continued? I most certainly have a sense of excitement about completing this research and knowing I have achieved completion. Mixed in with the excitement however is a sense of sadness to farewell Sam and Ana, a concern that I didn't allow the reader to fully understand them, that I didn't honour their story in the way they had hoped and a question about what difference will it make. In terms of the void, I know it will fill all too quickly and hope that I can maintain a space in it for continued exploration into working with victims of bullying.

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Appendix A – Information and Consent for Head of Counselling



Name: Amanda Gillespie
 Department: Health Sciences – Counselling
 Email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
 Date: July 2019

An exploration into my use of solution-focused counselling when working with adolescents who report experiencing bullying.

Information Sheet for Head of Counselling

Kia Ora,

My name is Amanda Gillespie and I am a student in the Master of Counselling Programme at the University of Canterbury, working as an intern in the counselling department of your school this year. I am hoping to conduct research within the Counselling Department of your school. The aim of this research is to look at my use of Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) when working with high school students who present for counselling due to their experience of being bullied. I hope to come away from this research with a greater understanding of the issues around bullying and to help the participants in a meaningful way that will inform my future practice.

As Head of Counselling, I wish to ensure that you are happy for me to proceed with this research within your department. The research will be practice-based and conducted throughout a series of counselling sessions. Transcripts and video recordings will be vital forms of data collection and will enable in depth analysis into the language used by both the therapist, the client and specific techniques of the model and the effect they have. In this research I aim to work ethically as both a researcher and counsellor, and for the purpose of this study, clients will be referred to as both research participants and students who receive counselling. In my dual role as researcher and counsellor I will always prioritise my role as counsellor and place the needs of my clients before the aims of my research.

I would like to ask for your permission to send an email to all students that explains what the research is about and then offers them an opportunity to contact me via email should they wish to be involved. There will be flyers displayed in the counselling department with the same information on them. Once interest has been obtained, I will meet with the students individually to discuss the research further, give them a more detailed information sheet, and answer any questions they may have. It is at this point I will also give them a consent form that needs to be signed by both the participant and a parent or guardian and returned to me

by 1st August 2019. I am also making it clear in my recruitment process that if there are students wishing to engage in counselling relating to their experience of bullying that do not wish to be part of my research, that I am happy to provide counselling from either myself or the appropriate counsellor.

You may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation and your school's identity will not be made public. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality pseudonyms will be used in any instance where names or any identifying material could be accessed e.g. File and folder names, material in transcripts etc. In the case that identifying material should be visible or needed for the research, redaction of names or places that may make them identifiable will take place to ensure this does not happen. I will not mention names or any other identifiable information about you or your school when discussing my research. Information regarding the study will be kept safely for up to five years after the completion of the study. After that, all physical documents will be shredded, and electronic files permanently deleted from any device. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library. You have the right to withdraw consent for this research to take place should you deem it necessary.

The project is being carried under the supervision of Shanee Barraclough, who can be contacted at shanee.barraclough@canterbury.ac.nz. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about student participation in the project. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Ngā Mihi Nui,

Amanda Gillespie



Name: Amanda Gillespie
 Department: Health Sciences – Counselling
 Email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
 Date: July 2019

An exploration into my use of solution-focused counselling when working with adolescents who report experiencing bullying.

Consent Form for Head of Counselling:

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project.
- ☐ I understand what is required of the participants who take part in this research.
- ☐ I understand that I can withdraw my consent for this research to take place.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and that withdrawal from the research is possible up until 27 September 2019. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information provided should this remain practically achievable.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions provided will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify the participant or their school. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after five years.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher Amanda Gillespie, (amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor Shanee Barraclough, (shanee.barraclough@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- ☐ By signing below, I give consent for Amanda Gillespie to conduct this research in my school.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please return to Amanda Gillespie via email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz or in person at school by 1st August 2019.

Appendix B – Information and Consent for Participants



Name: Amanda Gillespie
 Department: Health Sciences – Counselling
 Email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Date: July 2019

An exploration into my use of solution-focused counselling when working with adolescents who report experiencing bullying.

Information Sheet for Participants

Kia Ora,

My name is Amanda Gillespie, and I am an intern counsellor at your school. As part of my Master of Counselling qualification, I am conducting research into my own counselling practice. The aim of this research is to specifically look at the process and helpfulness of my counselling practice when working with those experiencing bullying. Due to the nature of this research being based in a school, I intend to gain parental/caregiver assent for any students under 18 years of age. I have been granted permission from both the Head of Counselling and Principal for this research to take place at your school.

The following information is to provide you with details of the study, how it will operate, and what the expectations of you as a participant might be.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will be no different than a 'typical' counselling session you would have at school, with your needs and wellbeing being my priority. Even though you are participating as a client in counselling, whose session will be used for research, the normal protocols apply, such as the confidentiality of your sessions (unless there is risk presented for either yourself or others).

The research will involve meeting to arrange a counselling session/s that will occur between 22 July, and 27th September 2019. Here, there will be an opportunity for you to discuss any questions or concerns you may have with me (the counsellor/researcher) if needed. Sessions will take place during school

hours in a private room and will last for approximately one hour or the length of a period. Between one and six counselling sessions will be used for the research. However, it is up to you how many counselling sessions you have. A maximum of six of your counselling sessions will be used for the research, although you may choose to come for more than six counselling sessions. I will take a video recording of all the sessions and make handwritten notes while doing so, as is my usual practice. I will be copying the session notes for my data, however the original notes will always remain at the school in your confidential student file, as is the school policy. After the sessions, I will write out transcripts and analyse the information presented in session. You may be seen arriving or leaving from the counselling department by other students, teachers or counsellors, but any personal information you provide in the session that will be used for the research (such as signed consent forms, video recordings and transcripts) will be stored on a password protected folder, on a password protected computer and/or in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office.

Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used in any instance where your names or any identifying material could be accessed e.g. file and folder names, material in transcripts etc. In the case that identifying material should be visible or needed for the research, redaction (or blacking out) of names or places that may make you identifiable will take place to ensure this does not happen. I will not mention names or any other identifiable information about you when discussing my research in any situation. Information regarding the study will be kept safely for up to five years after the completion of the study. After that, all physical documents will be shredded, and electronic files permanently deleted from any device.

Consent to take part in this research is important, and if you should change your mind during the sessions about any of your information being included in the study, you are able to discuss this with me. Due to the limitations and restraints of the research, and time involved in the recruitment process, the cut off date for removing yourself from the research will be 27 September 2019. If you do this, you are not 'disqualified' from counselling and your sessions may continue, the only difference being that your sessions won't be included in the research. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you in the research by shredding paper copies and permanently deleting any electronic files. The resulting withdrawal of data would mean that it is removed from my research in all ways, however your session notes will remain in your confidential file. This is in line with both the school and counselling department policy and means that some record of the counselling sessions remains (as is always the case), but not within the context of my research. There will also be an option to see another counsellor, should this be desired.

A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary. You will also be given a copy of the results. Other publications may include conference presentations or journal publications. As previously mentioned, client confidentiality is paramount in these arenas and I will not mention names or any other identifiable information about you when discussing my research.

In undertaking this research, I am aware that I cannot eliminate all risk, however, by identifying the areas where it may be present, I am better equipped to take steps to reduce this risk.

There is psychological risk present, as is always the case in counselling, where it is not possible to be certain of the psychological impact that as a counsellor we may have on our clients. To ensure best practice, I will adhere to the New Zealand Association of Counsellors Code of Ethics regarding student/counsellor safety, appropriate practice, and professional boundaries. This means that if you are

distressed at any time throughout the sessions and wish to stop, we will. This is no different to a normal counselling session where your safety is my biggest concern.

To reduce the cultural risk, I will aim to work as best I can within my cultural limitations, using basic counselling skills and techniques to inquire about any cultural customs of my clients. If my research takes me outside of these limitations, I will refer to my cultural supervisor for guidance.

There is some social risk in taking part in this research. Given that I am researching students who are experiencing bullying, they may fear being discovered to be taking part. To minimise this risk I will take every possible step to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. I will not gather the participants in a group at any stage and will ensure that the counsellors are aware of the need for discretion as clients come and go with the counselling department. I will also ensure that when meeting any clients during the timeframe of my research that I do so in a similar way so as not to indicate when a student is involved.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for the Master of Counselling under the supervision of Shanee Barraclough, who can be contacted at shanee.barraclough@canterbury.ac.nz. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return it to Amanda Gillespie via email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz, or in person at school by 1st August 2019.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Ngā Mihi Nui,

Amanda Gillespie



Name: Amanda Gillespie
 Department: Health Sciences – Counselling
 Email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Date: July 2019

An exploration into my use of solution-focused counselling when working with adolescents who report experiencing bullying.

Assent Form for participants:

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time without penalty, so long as this occurs prior to 27 September 2019. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify me or my school. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after five years.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher Amanda Gillespie, (amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor Shanee Barraclough, (shanee.barraclough@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- ☐ I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- ☐ By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Email address (*for report of findings, if applicable*): _____

Please return to Amanda Gillespie via email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz or in person at school by 1st August 2019.

Appendix C – Information and Consent for Parents/Caregivers



Name: Amanda Gillespie
 Department: Health Sciences – Counselling
 Email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
 Date: July 2019

An exploration into my use of solution-focused counselling when working with adolescents who report experiencing bullying.

Information Sheet for parents/caregivers:

Kia Ora,

My name is Amanda Gillespie, and I am an intern counsellor at _____ school. As part of my Master of Counselling qualification, I am conducting research into my own counselling practice. The aim of this research is to specifically look at my counselling practice when working with those experiencing bullying. Due to the nature of this research being based in a school, I intend to gain parental/caregiver assent for any students under 18 years of age. I have been granted permission from both the Head of Counselling and School Principal for this research to take place.

The following information is to provide you with details of the study, how it will operate, and what the expectations of _____, as a participant might be.

If _____ chooses to take part in this study, their involvement in this project will be no different than a 'typical' counselling session they would have at school, with their needs and wellbeing as my priority. Even though they are participating as a client in counselling, whose session will be used for research, the normal protocols apply, such as the confidentiality of their sessions (unless there is risk presented for either themselves or others).

The research will involve meeting to arrange a counselling session/s that will occur between 22 July, and 27th September 2019. Here, there will be an opportunity for them to discuss any questions or concerns you/they may have with me (the counsellor/researcher). Sessions will take place during school hours in a private room and will last for approximately one hour or the length of a period. I intend to have at least two sessions after which time the student does not need to attend any further sessions, but they are welcome to. A maximum of six of the counselling sessions will be used for the research, although they may choose to come for more or less than six counselling sessions. I will take a video recording of all the sessions and make handwritten notes while doing so, as is my usual practice. I will be copying the session notes for my data, however the original notes will always remain at the school in the confidential student file, as is the school policy. After the sessions, I will write out transcripts and analyse the information presented in session. The student may be seen arriving or leaving from the counselling department by other students, teachers or counsellors, but any personal information they provide in the session that will be used for the research (such as signed consent forms, video recordings and transcripts) will be stored on a password protected folder, on a password protected computer and/or in a locked filing

cabinet in a locked office.

Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used in any instance where names or any identifying material could be accessed e.g. File and folder names, material in transcripts etc. In the case that identifying material should be visible or needed for the research, redaction (or blacking out) of names or places that may make them identifiable will take place to ensure this does not happen. I will not mention names or any other identifiable information about the student when discussing my research in any situation. Information regarding the study will be kept safely for up to five years after the completion of the study. After that, all physical documents will be shredded, and electronic files permanently deleted from any device.

Consent to take part in this research is important, and if you, or _____, should change your mind about any of the information being included in the study, this is able to be discussed with me. Due to the limitations and restraints of the research, and time involved in the recruitment process, the cutoff date for removal from the research will be 27 September 2019. If they withdraw, they are not 'disqualified' from counselling and their sessions may continue, the only difference being that their sessions won't be included in the research. I will remove information relating to them in the research by shredding paper copies and permanently deleting any electronic files. The resulting withdrawal of data would mean that it is removed from my research in all ways, however session notes of any student at the school are to be kept in the students confidential file. This is in line with both the school and counselling department policy. This means that for those withdrawing from the research, some record of the counselling sessions remains (as is always explained when engaging with students at school), but not within the context of my research. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary. You will also be given a copy of the results. Other publications may include conference presentations or journal publications. As previously mentioned, client confidentiality is paramount in these arenas and I will not mention names or any other identifiable information about participants when discussing my research.

In undertaking this research, I am aware that I cannot eliminate all risk, however, by identifying the areas where it may be present, I am better equipped to take steps to mitigate this risk.

There is psychological risk present, as is always the case in counselling, where it is not possible to be certain of the psychological impact that as a counsellor we may have on our clients. To ensure best practice, I will adhere to the New Zealand Association of Counsellors Code of Ethics regarding student/counsellor safety, appropriate practice, and professional boundaries. This means that if is distressed at any time throughout the sessions and wishes to stop, we will. This is no different to a normal counselling context where client safety is my biggest concern.

To reduce the cultural risk, I will aim to work as best I can within my cultural limitations, using the counselling skills and techniques I possess to inquire about any cultural needs or customs of my clients. If my research takes me outside of these limitations, I will refer to my cultural supervisor for guidance.

There is some social risk in taking part in this research. Given that I am researching students who are experiencing bullying, they may fear being discovered to be taking part. To minimise this risk, I will take every possible step to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. I will recruit via email to allow participants to volunteer with complete confidentiality. I will not gather the participants in a group at any stage and will ensure that the counsellors are aware of the need for discretion as clients come and go within the counselling department. I will also ensure that when meeting any clients during the timeframe of my research that I do so in a similar way so as not to indicate when a student is involved. I will also ensure that if participants wish to report any bullying, and have not done so yet, that I provide the necessary support to allow this to occur.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for the Master of Counselling, under the supervision of Shane Barracough, who can be contacted at shanee.barracough@canterbury.ac.nz. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human

Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If _____ decides to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return it to Amanda Gillespie via email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz, or in person at school by the 1st August 2019.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Ngā Mihi Nui,

Amanda Gillespie

Name: Amanda Gillespie
Department: Health Sciences – Counselling
Email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
Date: July 2019

An exploration into my use of solution-focused counselling when working with adolescents who report experiencing bullying.

Consent Form for parents/guardians:

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project and _____ has had (and will continue to have) the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand what is required of _____ if I consent to them taking part in the research.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and that withdrawal from the research is possible up until 27 September 2019. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions provided will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify the participant or their school. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after five years.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher Amanda Gillespie, (amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor Shane Barracough, (shanee.barracough@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- ☐ I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- ☐ By signing below, I give consent for _____ to participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Email address (for report of findings, if applicable): _____

Please return to Amanda Gillespie via email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz or in person at school by 1st August 2019.

Appendix D – Information and Consent for Principal



Name: Amanda Gillespie
 Department: Health Sciences – Counselling
 Email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
 Date: 7 August 2019

An exploration into my use of solution-focused counselling when working with adolescents who report experiencing bullying.

Information Sheet for Principal

Kia Ora,

My name is Amanda Gillespie and I am a current student in the Master of Counselling Programme at the University of Canterbury, working as an intern in the counselling department of your school this year. I am hoping to conduct research within the Counselling Department of your school. The aim of this research is to look at my use of Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) when working with high school students who present for counselling due to their experience of being bullied. I hope to come away from this research with a greater understanding of the issues around bullying and to help the participants in a meaningful way that will inform my future practice.

I have spoken to the Head of Counselling, and he is supportive of this work and happy for me to proceed with this research within his department. The research will be practice-based and conducted throughout a series of counselling sessions. Transcripts and video recordings will be vital forms of data collection and will enable in depth analysis into the language used by both the therapist, the client and specific techniques of the model and the effect they have. In this research I aim to work ethically as both a researcher and counsellor, and for the purpose of this study, clients will be referred to as both research participants and students who receive counselling. In my dual role as researcher and counsellor I will always prioritise my role as counsellor and place the needs of my clients before the aims of my research.

I would like to ask for your permission to send an email to all students that explains what the research is about and then offers them an opportunity to contact me via email should they wish to be involved. There will be flyers displayed in the counselling department with the same information on them. Once interest has been obtained, I will meet with the students individually to discuss the research further,

give them a more detailed information sheet, and answer any questions they may have. It is at this point I will also give them a consent form that needs to be signed by both the participant and a parent or guardian and returned to me by 1st August 2019. I am also making it clear in my recruitment process that if there are students wishing to engage in counselling relating to their experience of bullying that do not wish to be part of my research, that I am happy to provide counselling from either myself or the appropriate counsellor.

You may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation and your school's identity will not be made public. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality pseudonyms will be used in any instance where names or any identifying material could be accessed e.g. File and folder names, material in transcripts etc. In the case that identifying material should be visible or needed for the research, redaction of names or places that may make them identifiable will take place to ensure this does not happen. I will not mention names or any other identifiable information about you or your school when discussing my research. Information regarding the study will be kept safely for up to five years after the completion of the study. After that, all physical documents will be shredded, and electronic files permanently deleted from any device. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library. You have the right to withdraw consent for this research to take place should you deem it necessary.

The project is being carried under the supervision of Shanee Barraclough, who can be contacted at shanee.barraclough@canterbury.ac.nz. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about student participation in the project. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Ngā Mihi Nui,

Amanda Gillespie



Name: Amanda Gillespie
 Department: Health Sciences – Counselling
 Email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
 Date: July 2019

An exploration into my use of solution-focused counselling when working with adolescents who report experiencing bullying.

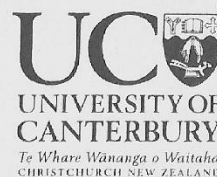
Consent Form for Principal:

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project.
- ☐ I understand what is required of the participants who take part in this research.
- ☐ I understand that I can withdraw my consent for this research to take place.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and that withdrawal from the research is possible up until 27 September 2019. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information participants have provided.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions provided will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify the participant or their school. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after five years.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher Amanda Gillespie, (amandahanafin@gmail.com) or supervisor Shanee Barraclough, (shanee.barraclough@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- ☐ By signing below, I give consent for Amanda Gillespie to conduct this research in my school.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please return to Amanda Gillespie via email: amanda.gillespie@pg.canterbury.ac.nz, or in person at school by 12th August 2019.

Appendix E: Education Research Human Ethics Committee approval letter



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
 Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588
 Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: 2019/43/ERHEC

6 August 2019

Amanda Gillespie
 Health Sciences
 UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Amanda

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "An Exploration Into My Use of Solution-Focused Counselling When Working With Adolescents Who Report Experiencing Bullying" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your emails of 24th, 25th and 30th July 2019.

Should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

pp *R. Robinson*

Dr Patrick Shepherd
Chair
Educational Research Human Ethics Committee

Please note that ethical approval relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research.

F E S

Appendix F: Transcript from Session One with Sam

Amanda So what I would like you to do is imagine you go home tonight, and you do everything you normally do when you go home from school. You have your normal routine and you go to bed and go to sleep like you would any other night. Then over the course of you sleeping there is going to be a miracle take place, okay so this is the imagination part. Someone comes along and sprinkles some fairy dust or waves a magic wand or it's one of those...I always think of those teen movies where like they wake up the next day and they are in a 30-year olds body and are like hold on. But regardless of how it happens, something has happened that has meant that everything that's making you a 3 at the moment, a 3.5 - everything that is going on around these horrible comments you are having to hear - that it is no longer impacting you anymore. So, I am not saying anything out there in the world has necessarily changed, but what has changed is you, and you are no longer impacted by this. So, everything that is bothering you right now, all those feelings that really sound like they are pretty tough, they are not there anymore. So, you wake up in the morning, but you do not realise that this miracle has taken place. So, the only way you are going to know is as you start going about your day, and I want you to think...what would you notice? If this was back to where you were a 6.5 for instance, or if it was back to where things are just ...or you imagine a future where everything is awesome. And you woke up in the morning and still have to come to school, but what would be different? What would be happening when you woke up that isn't happening now. So, I want you to just imagine that. (pause)Waking up in your bed and having everything sorted, and what would be the first, and you might not notice anything straight away. Sometimes people don't notice anything until maybe they see someone at home, or they are having breakfast, or they are at school. But often it is when you first wake up there might be something like - can you think of anything that might be different if you woke up and this problem wasn't there anymore?

Appendix G: Transcript from Session Two with Sam

- Amanda** So, when you are a 5 the first thing you said was you are not going to hate yourself, so you are going to be happier. And that is going to look like more socialising. What else is it going to look like when you are happier?
- Sam** Um (long pause). I don't know.
- Amanda** Mmm do you think. I remember last time we talked about what your family might notice at home. Do you think they would notice if you were at a 5 and happier?
- Sam** Yeah.
- Amanda** What things might they notice?
- Sam** Um, that I am probably in a good mood and not just walking around all sadly with my head facing the ground and stuff.
- Amanda** Okay so in a good mood. So, your head is up? You hold yourself in a kind of more positive, have your head up. I think we talked about initiating conversations too, didn't we? So, you might start a conversation with someone at home?
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** It sounds like you are already doing some really good initiating with your friends as well. Has anyone at home noticed that?
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** How do you know that?
- Sam** Um, because me and my dad went on this car trip yesterday to pick up my sister which was like 20 minutes.
- Amanda** Nice, car trips are always good for chat times aren't they.
- Sam** So it was just me and him and we were just talking, and he said that it looks like I have been a lot more happy lately and not always grumpy and stuff
- Amanda** Nice. that is so cool. So, he said not grumpy?
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** And not sad. Um, how did that feel to have him notice that?

- Sam** It felt good but at the same time it made me feel sad.
- Amanda** Yeah?
- Sam** Cause, it is kind of like he doesn't normally see me like that, which is not a good thing
- Amanda** Yeah, and I remember the last time there was a moment when I remember you noticing about your Dad, and it is clear that you really care about what he, you care about him worrying about you don't you?
- Sam** Mhmm
- Amanda** I get that really strong sense from you that you don't want to think of your Dad having to worry about you, but how cool that he is not as much now, right? So, him saying that. It is him telling you that he is not worrying about you as much and can see things getting better. So, there is a part of you that has that little bit of sadness that he ever had to, but does it give you the sense of wanting to continue that?
- Sam** Mhmm

Appendix H: Transcript from Session Three with Sam

- Amanda** Do you feel like it has impacted on you this week - having that happen?
- Sam** Kind of. It's just been just like sitting there.
- Amanda** Yeah. Okay, and you ignored it in the moment?
- Sam** No, it kind of hit pretty hard but I don't want to talk about it.
- Amanda** That's okay. So, you reacted?
- Sam** I reacted like everything was fine. But really it wasn't.
- Amanda** So you ignored it in the moment, but it really affected you.
- Sam** Mhmm.
- Amanda** So I just want to say that given that happened in the last week, and I am really sorry that it did, but the fact that you have said that things have stayed the same and you have been able to still identify a bunch of things that are going well, I really want to applaud you for being able to not let that derail you. Because that is huge and as you said it is sitting there and it has hurt - and it is so unfair that you have to deal with that. Have you talked to anyone else about it?
- Sam** Yeah. My friend.
- Amanda** Was that helpful?
- Sam** This friend is probably the best person in my life for advice. Like he is just a good guy.
- Amanda** Nice. And so, did you go to him straight away about it?
- Sam** Nah, he just realised that I was pretty sad. Cause he is always looking out for his friends.
- Amanda** How amazing that you have got someone in your life that without you even saying, I need to tell you something, can pick up on it. I am so glad that you have got someone like that in your life and I am really sorry that this had to happen this week - but you have managed to have a friend show you they cared, you have been able to open up about it and I hope that allows you to feel that....cause you know sometimes all these comments and this horrible

stuff that has been directed towards you ..it can derail you and have this power over you can't it.

Sam Mhmm

Amanda But, what I see is you starting to take some of that power back. And it is you that is starting to do that and you are doing it through recognising your friendships and the things you can do in your life that bring you joy and being able to open up to your friends. I think that is really incredible that you are able to do that given you have had that incident this week. So, my hope for you is that you can continue that upward trajectory and keep letting things feel better each day even though this thing happened. And knowing that you can't control those comments that are directed towards you, but you can control how you deal with it and it sounds like you dealt with it so well.

Appendix I: Transcript from Session Two with Ana

- Amanda** Has it been helpful talking about all this stuff today?
- Ana** Yeah (said very quickly).
- Amanda** Did you feel today that it has felt like we are making some kind of progress with working together?
- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** I am pleased you want to come again, and it makes me hope that you are seeing some benefit in it. Is there anything that you would like me to be doing differently?
- Ana** I don't know.
- Amanda** I know that the way I work is very much focused on looking at things being better, and I know that can be really hard when things don't feel better yet, so the idea is that it is to help you start to see what you want it to look like, because focusing on what we want actually helps us get there. Focusing on what we don't want, often just keeps you stuck in it. Does that make sense?
- Ana** Yeah.
- Amanda** But sometimes we just want to talk about how crap it is, so I hope you know that you can also bring that as well. And honestly you have demonstrated so much strength and resilience in such a tricky situation. I really want to say how impressed I am with your ability to open up to me and think about things and be honest about a really hard time that you are going through.

Appendix J: Transcript from Session Four with Ana

- Amanda** So you have a whole term ahead of you and where would you like to be by the end of the year?
- Ana** Probably around a 9.
- Amanda** Mhmm. I think that is a fantastic goal. And how likely do you think it is that you will be at a 9?
- Ana** I don't really know, but I hope I can, because I am not really sure what is going to happen in the next few weeks.
- Amanda** And that is a really powerless place to be. But you have actually seen that through your actions that things have gotten better. And I don't think you would have aimed for a 9 the first time I saw you.
- Ana** Yeah (laughing).
- Amanda** So how likely is it that you get to that 9 if we think of it from 1 to 10.
- Ana** Probably around 80%.
- Amanda** Wow, that is fantastic. What would make it 90%?
- Ana** Being sure that everything will work out. Yeah that would help.
- Amanda** Yeah. And how would you know? What is going to tell you?
- Ana** That even though I am not invited to something or doing something that they will still want to talk to me and stuff like that.
- Amanda** Okay so part of it is going to be a bit of time passing and seeing that when different things happen, seeing that your relationship can stay at the place you are now or even better. Even though different things happen, as happens in life.
- Ana** Yeah.